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Watchdogs Force NNSA to Post Strategic Plans for its Nuclear Weapons Sites

Santa Fe, NM: The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), the semi-autonomous nuclear weapons agency within the Department of Energy, has quietly posted “Ten Year Site Plans” (TYSPs) for all of its eight active nuclear weapons research, production and testing sites, available at: http://nnsa.energy.gov/infrastructure/Ten-year_site_plan.htm

This unprecedented electronic access to NNSA’s strategic planning for each of its sites is the result of a successful three-year Freedom of Information Act lawsuit by Nuclear Watch New Mexico. NNSA had pushed for approval of proposed “transformation” of its nuclear weapons complex before the Bush Administration left office, and had cited these Plans as primary reference documents for legally required public review and comment on its “Complex Transformation” proposal. However, the agency refused to allow public access to these Plans, despite the fact that they are rigorously scrubbed in advance for sensitive security information.

According to NNSA:

The TYSPs are the sites’ primary real property planning documents in support of NNSA’s vision for the Future Nuclear Complex and Program objectives... The sites’ FY 2009-2018 TYSPs will align with the Preferred Alternative for the Draft Complex Transformation Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement. (NNSA FY-2009-2018 TYSP Guidance, January 2008, p. 1.)

Additionally, these Plans are authoritative references for detailed site descriptions, employment levels, budgets, future missions, and proposed new or upgraded facilities. Access to these Plans should help inform public debate over future nuclear weapons policies, which Congress has required the Obama Administration to address through a new “Nuclear Posture Review.”

In his inaugural speech President Obama pledged to “do our business in the light of day, because only then can we restore the vital trust between a people and their government.” Jay Coghlan, Nuclear Watch Executive Director, commented, “I am hopeful, but at the same time am reminded of a past president, Ronald Reagan, who famously said ‘Trust, but verify.’ In the event that the federal government persists in not supplying in the light of day the necessary information for informed public debate over future U.S. nuclear weapons policies, then citizens should fully exercise their rights under the Freedom of Information Act. Democracy remains as a muscle, even under this new Administration – use it or lose it.”

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In our democracy, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which encourages accountability through transparency, is the most prominent expression of a profound national commitment to ensuring an open Government. At the heart of that commitment is the idea that accountability is in the interest of the Government and the citizenry alike... Let me say it as simply as I can. Transparency and the rule of law will be the touchstones of this presidency. President Barack Obama, January 21, 2009.

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Some notable examples from the Plans for each site follow (page numbers are from each site's respective plan). However, these are just cursory snapshots that cannot do justice to the wealth of information available through these online Plans.

- The **Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL)** clearly understands that it must diversify its mission. “While the NNSA operations are consolidating, the Laboratory sees potential growth in areas such as threat reduction, homeland security, and national problems in defense, energy, and the environment. The Laboratory is in a strong position to support the science and technology base essential for R&D capabilities for national security. The above being said, additional and improved mechanisms for supporting and allowing work-for-others facilities at the Laboratory need to be established.” P. 4. Despite that, the Plan does little to lower the Lab's very high cost of business, which alone could block mission diversification. Moreover, the Lab continues to aggressively seek construction of the Chemical and Metallurgical Research Replacement Project “Nuclear Facility” that could enable resumed nuclear weapons production through expanded plutonium pit production.
- The **Sandia National Laboratories** also recognize the need for mission diversification and plan to reduce nuclear weapons staff by up to 20% over the next ten years. P. 4. “Sandia's comprehensive capabilities derive from the realization that the world's security depends not only on the nation's nuclear weapons stockpile, but also on energy and infrastructure assurance issues... Although the focus of Sandia's mission remains national security, Sandia recognizes that the meaning of “national security” is changing.” P. 9. Still, nuclear weapons programs remain central to Sandia, with a new Integrated Weapons Engineering Transformation Facility that “will support an integrated modern Weapons Engineering capability to meet current and future missions of nuclear stockpile maintenance and weapon development.” P. 12. The latter strongly implies that Sandia has yet to completely give up on new nuclear weapons designs, so-called Reliable Replacement Warheads, which have been rejected by Congress.
- The **Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory** also seems to recognize that it eventually may get out of the nuclear weapons business. “Defense Programs activities will wind down with the cessation of [nuclear weapons] environmental testing and hydrodynamic testing. Defense Program activities at Site 300 will be phased out as alternatives for performing this work become available, with all weapons account activity ceasing after 2015.” P. 2-4. As previously stated, the FY09 TYSPs reflect alternatives in NNSA's draft “Complex Transformation” proposal. However, in its final proposal NNSA has reaffirmed Livermore's ongoing involvement in nuclear weapons programs, in fact designating it as its center for high explosives R&D, and has decided to not shut down Site 300 for the foreseeable future.
- The **Nevada Test Site (NTS)** will become the center for nonnuclear explosive tests for nuclear weapons with a planned “next generation” hydrodynamic test facility which would replace the as-yet unfinished and expensive hydrodynamic test facility at LANL. NTS is also slated for the more dangerous nuclear weapons assembly and disassembly operations, as its Plan states, “The NTS will continue to support Pantex disassembly and some of its Life Extension Program activities by dealing with the more complex and time consuming systems (boutique Nuclear Explosive Operations) to allow Pantex to continue in Nuclear Explosive Operations production mode.” Pp. v-vi, parentheses in original.
- The **Kansas City Plant (KCP)** manufactures and/or procures 85% of all nuclear weapons components. NNSA plans to move to a new plant built by private financing by 2012. Congressional support for the move is largely predicated on the assumption that the old plant will be cleaned up of heavy PCB and industrial solvent contamination so that it can be reused for badly needed local economic development. In a 2007 study the Kansas City municipal government states that the need for “several millions of dollars” for pre-sale cleanup

could be a barrier to potential reuse. In contrast, the KCP FY09 Ten Year Site Plan states that \$52 million will be needed in related demolition and cleanup. P. 72. This higher cost could completely dash the City's hopes for reuse and economic development of the old site. While comprehensive cleanup remains uncertain, at the federal government's request the City plans to issue municipal bonds to help finance this new federal nuclear weapons components production plant.

- NNSA operates tritium extraction and purification facilities at the **Savannah River Site (SRS)** near Aiken, SC. Tritium, a radioactive isotope of hydrogen, is used to "boost" the destructive power of nuclear weapons. "Workload for the Tritium Supply and Nuclear Stockpile Maintenance missions is based on the requirements of the Master Nuclear Schedule, Volume III, Issue 78, which supports Production and Planning Directive 2007-0." P. 3. As the document number indicates, that directive was issued in 2007 under the Bush Administration. SRS' tritium workload is therefore predicated on a stockpile size in the many thousands that is now probably obsolete should the new Obama Administration further reduce the stockpile. NNSA also has a mixed oxide plutonium fuel mission at SRS under its Nuclear Nonproliferation Program for the claimed purpose of burning up military plutonium in commercial nuclear power plants. "The program to disposition up to 34 metric tons of surplus plutonium is estimated to require approximately 13 years of operation, but it will be licensed for 20 years." P. 21. That reflects promises made by DOE to South Carolina that excess plutonium shipped to SRS would stay there only for a limited time. However, the stated 13 years of operation is highly unlikely given schedule delays and cost overruns for SRS' Mixed Oxide Fuel Facility, while the fate of a proposed Pit Disassembly and Conversion Facility (PDCF) that would provide plutonium feed material remains highly uncertain.

- Concerning the nuclear weapons workload at the **Pantex Plant** near Amarillo, TX, "Pantex completed approximately 1000 units in FY 2007 and has demonstrated the capacity and capability to achieve 1200 units during FY08." P. 2. Pantex is the site for both nuclear weapons assembly and disassembly, and "units" completed does not distinguish between the two. "The workload projected for Pantex is changing in significant ways that impact planning for funding, personnel, and facilities... the workload decreases from FY 2008 to FY2010, increases slightly in FY 2011, then increases beginning in FY 2012 and peaks in FY 2015. The increase in FY 2012 represents the start of neutron generator change out and increase in dismantlement activities. The peak in FY 2015 represents additional neutron generator change outs and increases in JTAs [Joint Test Assemblies for flight testing] and surveillance." P. 22.

- The **Y-12 Plant** near Oak Ridge, TN, produces highly enriched uranium (HEU) components ("secondaries") for today's thermonuclear weapons. All nuclear weapons being refurbished in "Life Extension Programs" (LEP) receive a new or rebuilt secondary. "Plans for the W76 LEP include preparation for an NWC [nuclear weapons complex]-wide first production unit (FPU) in FY 2009. In FY 2009 and 2010, production quantities will ramp up to a near steady-state level. Production will be ongoing for more than 10 years... The W78 LEP currently has an FPU date of FY 2023. In light of congressional holds placed on the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) program and changes in the Nuclear Weapons Enterprise strategy, the likelihood of a W78 LEP has increased." P. 7. Y-12 proposes to build a \$2.2 billion Uranium Processing Facility for new HEU component production (p. 64), scheduled for operations in FY 2018 (p. viii). However media reports already put escalating costs at \$3.5 billion.

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