



NNSA Finally Starts Overdue Los Alamos Lab Environmental Study for Nuclear Weapons Programs That Are Already Underway

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Santa Fe, NM – Today, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), the semi-autonomous nuclear weapons agency with the Department of Energy, released a *Notice of Intent to Prepare a Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement for Continued Operation of the Los Alamos National Laboratory*.

In its formal notice, NNSA avoids mentioning the elephant in the room, the already predetermined expanded production of plutonium “pits,” the radioactive cores of nuclear weapons. **This is in direct contradiction to the National Environmental Policy Act’s requirement that federal agencies take a “hard look” at proposed actions before implementation.**

Moreover, future pit production is not to maintain the safety and reliability of the existing stockpile, but instead is for speculative, untested new-design nuclear weapons for the accelerating nuclear arms race. The Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) is already spending billions of taxpayers’ dollars to upgrade plutonium facilities and hire more workers for more weapons of mass destruction. This site-wide EIS is a “check off the box” exercise for all the major changes since the last site-wide EIS in 2008. Since then the Lab has fundamentally changed into a nuclear weapons production site as its main mission.

The Department of Energy boosted Lab funding to \$4.6 billion in FY 2023 (21% higher than FY 2022), which begins this coming October 1. Of that, \$3.6 billion is slated for NNSA’s core nuclear weapons research and production programs, with expanded plutonium pit production taking the biggest slice of the pie at \$1.63 billion. The percentage of nuclear weapons funding at LANL has steadily grown as the Lab increasingly banks its future on being a nuclear weapons production site. Today it is 73% of total institutional funding.

Concerning the new site-wide environmental impact statement, Jay Coghlan, Director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, stated, "This is too little too late, a sham process designed to circumvent citizen enforcement of the National Environmental Policy Act. The key sentence in NNSA’s announcement is that absent any new decisions in the site-wide environmental impact statement the agency will continue to implement decisions it previously made behind closed doors. The notice disingenuously doesn’t even mention dirty and exorbitantly expensive plutonium pit production. But predictably NNSA will rubber stamp the Los Alamos Lab’s head-long rush into expanded pit production, which is one more escalating step in the dangerous new nuclear arms race."

Nuclear Watch New Mexico Operations Director, Scott Kovac, commented, “Nevertheless, public participation will still be very important to identify environmental and social justice issues for analysis. We can get a better picture of radioactive wastes generated at LANL and the hazards to the community, but we’re going to have to get out in front and ask a lot of questions.”

Following the scoping process announced in this notice (which will include virtual public meetings), NNSA will prepare a Draft Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement (SWEIS) for the continued operation of the Laboratory, which it expects to issue sometime in 2023. NNSA will hold one or more public hearings for the Draft SWEIS.

Other issues that are imperative to address in a new LANL Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement are:

- The slow pace of cleanup, which prompted the New Mexico Environment Department to sue DOE to terminate a Consent Order that governs environmental remediation at the Lab.
- Truly comprehensive cleanup that will permanently protect precious water resources instead of the “cap and cover” that LANL proposes, leaving some 200,000 cubic yards of radioactive and toxic wastes buried in unlined pits and trenches.
- The growing threat of wildfires caused by climate change, which unfortunately New Mexico is growing all too familiar with. Mandatory evacuation of the Lab and Los Alamos townsite were forced by the 2000 Cerro Grande Fire, which came within a half-mile of some 40,000 radioactive waste drums at Area G (most drums have since been removed). This is a reminder that nuclear weapons programs, radioactive contamination and wildfires are not a good mix.
- LANL’s chronic track record of nuclear safety incidences. In the past this forced a three-year suspension of major operations at LANL’s main plutonium facility, now the site for expanded plutonium pit production.
- Yet more generation of plutonium radioactive wastes which NNSA believes it can stick on New Mexico at the already oversubscribed Waste Isolation Pilot Plant.
- Environmental and social justice issues given that New Mexico is minority majority. The Department of Energy will be spending \$9.4 billion in FY 2023 in New Mexico (71% for core nuclear weapons research and production programs), substantially greater than the state’s entire budget of \$8.5 billion. But what good does that do for the average New Mexican?

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An “inspection copy” of NNSA’s Notice of Intent to prepare a new LANL site-wide environmental impact statement is available today at <https://www.federalregister.gov/public-inspection/2022-17901/environmental-impact-statements-availability-etc-los-alamos-national-laboratory> The formal Notice of Intent will be published in the Federal Register tomorrow.

This press release is available online at <https://nukewatch.org/lanl-sweis-noi-pr/>