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**[MASE] Groups ask to resume public meetings on bomb plant**

1 message

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To: MASE &lt;mase@src.org&gt;

**Groups ask to resume public meetings on bomb plant**

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SANTA FE – Seven non-governmental organizations are asking the New Mexico Environment Department and the Department of Energy for the resumption of semi-annual presentations covering the production of plutonium pits at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The public participation provisions are contained in a 2005 settlement agreement. The settlement was reached after the same seven organizations objected to the issuance of an air emissions permit for the proposed Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Project.

At the same time, a New Mexico Environment Department draft air emissions permit is being prepared for public review and comment on releases from the lab and manufacturing facilities. The organizations said they are working to ensure those provisions – public meetings covering construction at the weapons-component production facilities and a dedicated website – are included in the air permit.

**Heinrich secures funding**

Taxpayer funding is escalating to support the expanded manufacture of plutonium triggers, or pits, for nuclear weapons at Los Alamos, the organizations said. The Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration announced in May 2018 its plans to expand the production of bomb cores to at least 30 pits per year at Los Alamos and at least 50 pits per year at the Savannah River Site in South Carolina.

U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-New Mexico, and a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, announced June 15 that he supported full funding in the fiscal year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act to secure Los Alamos' role as the nation's Center of Excellence for Plutonium Research. The committee voted 25-2 to advance the bill to the Senate floor.

The legislation authorizes \$1.1 billion for Los Alamos' ongoing plutonium operations and pit production programs. The funding supports personnel, equipment and other activities to meet pit production requirements by 2026.

Highlights include: \$611 million for plutonium operations, \$226 million to support pit production, \$30 million to construct new fire-control panels in the plutonium pit production facility, PF-4; \$27 million for fire protection and equipment, power and communications improvements in PF-4, \$37 million for transuranic liquid waste handling, and \$169 million for upgrades related to replacing the outdated Chemistry and Metallurgy Research building.

**Groups' argument**

The historic 2005 agreement resulted in the state Environment Department issuing an air permit for only part of a proposed project to expand nuclear weapons production at the Lab.

“At the time, DOE had plans to build a Radiologic Laboratory Utility Office Building and a Super Walmart-size Nuclear Facility within the proposed Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Project,” the groups said.

Specific language in the settlement agreement requires Los Alamos to apply for a permit revision prior to initiating construction for the proposed Nuclear Facility, which eventually was deferred, then canceled during the Obama administration. Los Alamos stopped the public meetings in 2012.

But the organizations argue that the underlying purpose of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Project always has been, and continues to be, a replacement for the 1960-era Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Building and therefore the public participation requirements must resume.

They cite congressional budget documents showing that the Department of Energy has requested \$169 million for FY 2021 to continue work on facilities that will replace the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research building, which has outstanding safety and seismic issues.

“This would be a \$983,000 increase over the enacted fiscal year 2020 budget,” the organizations said.

#### **State review?**

DOE plans an additional half-billion dollars [\$500,000,000] through 2025 for the project, which includes construction work at the Radiologic Laboratory Utility Office Building and the plutonium facility.

In the organizations' letter to the Department of Energy and the state Environment Department, they requested that the semi-annual public meetings resume by early fall, and the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Project website be updated and maintained until the Radiologic Laboratory Utility Office Building reconfiguration and the plutonium facility upgrades are completed.

Additionally, all documents and presentations from the previous 13 public meetings must be reposted, they said.

The organizations also are asking that the unilateral decision by the DOE/National Nuclear Security Administration to increase the amount of plutonium equivalent allowed in the Radiologic Laboratory Utility Office Building – from 8.4 grams to 400 grams – be reviewed by the Environment Department.

The organizations include Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, Nuclear Watch New Mexico, Tewa Women United, the New Mexico Environmental Law Center, Peace Action, the Loretto Community, and the Embudo Valley Environmental Monitoring Group.

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**Keep Uranium In The Ground!**