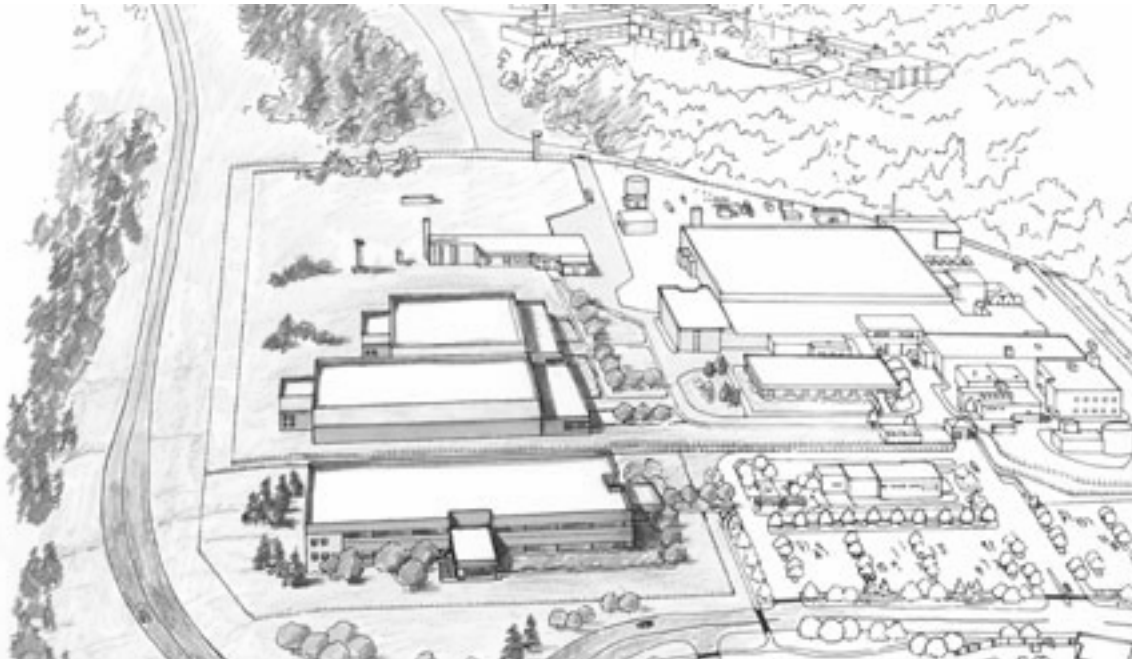


The Chemical and Metallurgical Research Building Replacement Project A New Advanced Plutonium Lab For Los Alamos?

The Chemical and Metallurgical Research (CMR) Building, in the heart of Los Alamos National Laboratory's (LANL) Technical Area 3, is the principle site where LANL conducts analytical chemistry and materials characterization on "special nuclear materials," that is plutonium and highly enriched uranium. Plutonium and highly enriched uranium are the critical materials for nuclear weapons. The analytical chemistry and materials characterization operations conducted at the CMR building are in direct support of plutonium pit production. Plutonium pits are the essential component in nuclear weapons.

Initial construction of the CMR building was completed in 1952. In 1960, an additional 64,000 square feet were added to the then nearly 500,000 square foot facility for remotely operated hot cells. Over the past decade the CMR building has suffered from a series of safety problems, the most notable being a serious explosion in November 1997. Recent seismic studies have shown that the facility is at high risk to a seismic event, should one occur. In an attempt to modernize the facility and bring the building up to code, the Department



CMR Replacement Conceptual Drawing: *LANL Daily News Bulletin*, 7-24-2002,
www.lanl.gov/orgs/pa/newsbulletin/images/CMR_rendition.jpg

of Energy (DOE) sunk several hundred million dollars into the CMR building. These upgrades included upgrades to support DOE's efforts to re-establish plutonium pit production at LANL. During the mid to late 1990s, DOE's intent was to establish plutonium pit production rates of 80 pits a year for the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile. Due in large part to problems at the CMR Building DOE was forced to scale back its projected production rate to 20 pits year. To date DOE and LANL have not even realized that goal. LANL is expected to make its first stockpile ready plutonium pit in 2007 at a cost of \$1.7 billion for that one pit.

DOE and LANL are on the verge of realizing a long-term dream. After sinking hundreds of millions of

dollars into upgrades and repairs into a virtual black hole, the DOE has released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the CMR Building's replacement.

An earlier proposal to replace the CMR Building was seriously considered in the early 1990s. Local activists stalled this project, called the Special Nuclear Materials Research and Development Laboratory, through the National Environmental Policy Act. The project limped along until Congress slashed funding at the end of the Cold War and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, stating that there was no apparent need for such a facility in a post-Cold War world.

The proposed CMR Building replacement, has been estimated in the past to cost up to \$900 million. DOE revised its initial costs down and is now claiming that the facility will only cost about \$600 million, with a savings of around \$400 million by following a simultaneous design/build approach. However DOE and LANL have a really hard time keeping costs down when they are well organized, and a design/build approach does not bode well for organization. In addition to directly supporting pit production, it would be used extensively for containment vessel washout from dynamic experiments conducted at LANL's Dual Axis Radiographic Hydrotest Facility and the future Advanced Hydrotest Facility. These two facilities conduct dynamic experiments, which are in essence tests in which plutonium is blown up. The number of these dynamic experiments are expected to double in the coming years. The DEIS also proposes that Hazard Category 2 nuclear operations be relocated from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory to LANL's CMR Building replacement. Even though the project is still under public review and an EIS has not been completed, Congress allocated \$14.5 million in design money and \$1.7 million in construction funding for lite labs and office space for the CMR Building replacement. Construction is scheduled to begin in late 2004.

Nuclear Watch of New Mexico maintains that there is still no need for such a facility. The CMR Building replacement serves to further new regressive U.S. nuclear weapons policies. These policies were first formalized under the Bush Jr. Administration's 2001 Nuclear Posture Review (for more on the Nuclear Posture Review, see www.nukewatch.org/facts/nwd/nprbulletin.pdf) and most recently Congress' approval of research and development funding for the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator and the overturning of the decade old prohibition against mini-nuke research and development. The mission of the CMR replacement will be in direct support of efforts to fully modernize the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile, resume nuclear weapons production, and design new weapons. Not only are these efforts in contravention to international treaties in which the U.S. unequivocally committed to full and complete disarmament, such as the 1970 NonProliferation Treaty, but they will further help to destabilize nuclear weapons arms control and could lead to a new nuclear arms race. Concerned about the intent of these new U.S. efforts, Russia and China have already begun to examine methods to modernize their own nuclear weapons stockpiles.

A series of public hearings on the DEIS will be held by DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration. The hearings will be held from 6:30 PM to 9:00 PM. Hearing dates and locations are:

June 3, 2003, Fuller Lodge, Central Avenue, Los Alamos, New Mexico, (for information, call 505-662-8105); and

June 4, 2003, Pablo Roybal Elementary School Multi-Purpose Room, Pojoaque, New Mexico off Hwy 502 (for information, call 505-455-7603).

The National Nuclear Security Administration will accept oral and written comments at the two hearings.

For Nuclear Watch of New Mexico's comments on the CMR Building replacement's DEIS and ready to send comments, please see our web site www.nukewatch.org after June 20, 2003. Public comments are due by June 30, 2003 and should be mailed, faxed, or emailed to Elizabeth Withers, U.S. DOE, Los Alamos Site Office, 528 35th St, Los Alamos, NM 87544-2201, fax: 505-667-9998, or email: cmrreis@doeal.gov.

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