



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 18, 2007

Contact: Jay Coghlan, Nuclear Watch NM, 505.989.7342, c. 505.920.7118, [jay@nukewatch.org](mailto:jay@nukewatch.org)

## **LANL Named Preferred Permanent Plutonium Pit Production Center**

Santa Fe, NM – Today, the head of the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), the semi-autonomous nuclear weapons agency within the Department of Energy, briefly laid out the agency’s vision for its future nuclear weapons research, testing and production complex. NNSA’s plans were formerly known as “Complex 2030,” the year by which it had hoped to achieve it. However, the agency has suffered a number of stinging defeats, recently culminating in Congressional rejection of funding for proposed new-design nuclear weapons, the so-called Reliable Replacement Warheads (RRWs). Congress also rejected funding for a new production facility at one of five candidate sites to mass-produce plutonium pit “triggers” for RRW.

In response, the NNSA has retreated to a “transformation” plan for its nuclear weapons complex, and designated the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) as its “preferred alternative” for the nation’s permanent plutonium pit production site. NNSA intends to raise the currently sanctioned level of production at LANL from 20 pits per year to up to 80. Another option that NNSA is considering is that LANL could produce up to 200 pits per year. All of this manufacturing capability would be enabled by the expansion in scope and size of a new nuclear facility now being designed as part of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement project, and/or the construction of an entirely new plant called the plutonium “Manufacturing Annex.”

Jay Coghlan, Executive Director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, declared, “In reality, there is little, if any, need to produce plutonium pits. Since the early 1990’s DOE has argued that it needed to reestablish pit production at LANL because it had no spare pits for annual stockpile stewardship analysis of the sub-launched nuclear weapon, the W88. That lack of spares resulted from a 1989 FBI raid investigating environmental crimes at the notorious Rocky Flats Plant, which shut down pit production. However, as NNSA itself admits, only one pit per weapons type is destroyed through destructive analysis each year. It then follows that LANL needs to produce only one W88 pit per year.”

Further, under the Moscow Treaty deployed nuclear weapons are going to be reduced to 2,200 or under by 2013. Why can’t the number of deployed W88s -- currently estimated at ~350 -- be reduced so as to create spare pits for destructive analysis without any new pit production?

551 West Cordova Road #808 Santa Fe, New Mexico 87505  
505.989.7342  
[info@nukewatch.org](mailto:info@nukewatch.org) [www.nukewatch.org](http://www.nukewatch.org)

With respect to the other types of nuclear weapons in the planned “enduring” stockpile, the Pantex Plant near Amarillo, TX, is sanctioned by NNSA to re-qualify up to 300 existing pits per year through “pit reuse.” Although this is not widely known, it effectively renders moot any argument for the need to produce pits other than the W88. The Pantex Plant itself boasts how pit reuse is far cheaper for the taxpayer and less environmentally damaging than producing new pits. Finally, above all, late last year independent experts (the JASONs) concluded that existing pits have reliable lifetimes of a century or more. In contrast, the oldest pits in the planned stockpile are now just under 30 years old. Coghlan added, “NNSA should play by the rule that if it isn’t broken, don’t fix it. We simply don’t need new expensive, dangerous and internationally provocative pit production.”

The real reason NNSA wants expanded pit production is for new nuclear weapons designs, the so-called Reliable Replacement Warheads (RRW). LANL is scheduled to go into full production of up to 50 RRW pits per year by fiscal year 2012. But again, Congress has just deleted all funding for RRW in a giant omnibus appropriations bill. Assuming that bill survives a possible presidential veto for other budget reasons, it clearly means that LANL needs to produce few plutonium pits, if any at all.

Unnecessary and expanded plutonium pit production could block the Los Alamos Lab from much needed mission diversification into addressing real and immediate security threats. Those true needs are in nonproliferation, making our ports near bullet proof against smuggled WMDs, combating climate change and national energy independence. Mission diversification would also help ensure jobs and a healthy northern New Mexican economy. NNSA’s choice to expand pit production at Los Alamos is a backwards step from these needed directions.

###

Public hearings in New Mexico on NNSA’s “transformation” plan will be held at:

**Socorro**, New Mexico, Macey Center (at New Mexico Tech), 801 Leroy Place, Socorro, NM, Monday, March 10, 2008 (6 pm - 10 pm)

**Albuquerque**, NM, Albuquerque Convention Center, 401 2nd St NW, Albuquerque, NM, Tuesday, March 11, 2008 (11 am - 3 pm and 6 pm - 10 pm)

**Los Alamos**, NM, Hilltop House, Los Alamos, NM, Thursday, March 13, 2008 (11 am - 3 pm)

**Santa Fe**, NM, Genoveva Chavez Community Center, 3221 Rodeo Road, Santa Fe, NM, Thursday, March 13, 2008 (6 pm - 10 pm)