



"float like a butterfly, bite like a dawg"

newsletter of nuclear watch new mexico volume 2, issue 1

LANL Wants Controversial New Biology Lab

Early this February, Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) requested scoping comments on the proposed construction of a biological research facility. These comments will help determine areas of investigation for an Environmental Assessment (EA). An EA is used to study the effects of research programs on the surrounding environment



Life forms of vital national security interest

and communities. LANL didn't supply the invited commenters with adequate documentation on its intended research goals, nor was LANL's background in studying dangerous biological agents brought to light.

The proposed lab is a biosafety level 3. Biosafety levels range from 1 to 4 and are determined by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). A level 1 laboratory is equivalent to many high school biology classrooms. A level 4 laboratory is designed to study the most dangerous biotoxins such as Ebola. LANL's biolab will be designed to contain airborne or easily aerosolized bioagents.

Information received by **NWNM** shows that LANL lacks any readily accessible documents of substance for public review -- hence nothing on which to comment. Ironically, one of the documents **NWNM** received on the proposed facility stated that part of the mission of the B division (LANL's Bioscience division) was to engage "the public in evaluating the proposed project and its impacts." The facts clearly indicate otherwise. There is inadequate communication between LANL and the public; it certainly does not appear that there is a "comprehensive communications plan" if our dialogue with LANL is any singular example.

At the same time, the Department of Energy's (DOE) Office of Inspector General (OIG) released a report on the mishandling of biological

organisms at DOE laboratories nationwide. Two of the worst infractions were at Sandia National Laboratory in Albuquerque and at LANL.

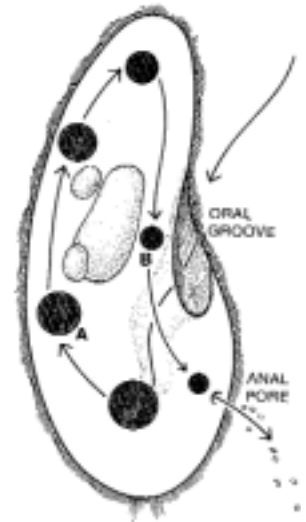
LANL has been conducting experiments on the bacterium that causes the fatal disease anthrax. Although OIG states that this is a weakened strain, it could still be deadly. The report claims that if the BSL facility is built, there are plans to study

fully viable strains. The OIG does not delineate the purposes of these studies.

The OIG does state that LANL has a very poor safety plan, and has not determined if it would be effective in the event of an accident. It's not clear whether LANL has informed the CDC of its biological research programs. Why might this be significant? If the CDC does not know what LANL is researching, they will have a much more difficult time responding to an accident.

The OIG concluded that neither the DOE nor LANL were prepared to handle dangerous biological agents, but the B division hopes to increase its operating budget by 8% annually in core research areas, including the proposed lab. A headline in a recent LANL newsletter distributed to all lab employees claimed that "Bioscience [is] key to the lab's future."

For our full report, and the OIG report, please visit www.nukewatch.org.



To help reduce LANL's habitual cost overruns, NukeWatch's team of architects has submitted a design to the DOE for the new bio lab. Aerial view shown here.

Upside Down National Priorities

More \$\$ For Nuclear Weapons, Cuts To Cleanup

FEDERAL
BUDGET
CRITIQUE

Just over a year ago the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) tried to require of Westinghouse Inc. (the manager of DOE's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant) financial assurance that the surface of the dump would be cleaned up after closure. This immediately provoked much huffing and puffing from federal officials. Bill Richardson (then DOE Secretary) said he would sue his own state of New Mexico (and any DOE lawsuit is backed by unlimited taxpayers' money!). Senator Pete Domenici declared that New Mexicans should rely on the "full faith and credit of the federal government." Just to make sure, he rammed through federal legislation that prohibited any cleanup bond. Now we have this year's DOE budget. It **increases \$\$ for nuclear weapons programs (thus inevitably creating more waste) while cutting cleanup.** So much for the "full faith and credit of the federal government."

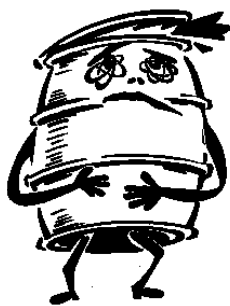
Tens of thousands of acres of the nuclear weapons complex are contaminated with hazardous and radioactive materials that threaten groundwater. DOE has admitted that it doesn't adequately understand the extent and composition of that contamination. As to the government doing the right thing, this is the nuclear weapons complex that knowingly dosed most of the US with fallout from atmospheric testing in the 1950's. [The Kodak Corporation knew because its film was being ruined in New York after weapons tests in Nevada. After Kodak threatened to sue, the government agreed to notify it, but not the American public!] This is also the complex that used taxpayers' money to quash the legitimate health complaints of its own workers, but took a half-century to acknowledge it (and still no compensation).

Where has the once-promised peace dividend gone? For nuclear weapons, it has disappeared into today's consolidated, revitalized complex that is seeking to preserve nuclear weapons literally "forever" while saddling future generations with the cleanup debt. And for what, a "safer" world in terms of our own national security interests? The biggest threat to our country is a world with nuclear weapons. Lest the public be deluded into thinking that this threat is over, the closest we ever came to a nuclear holocaust was in 1995, well after the end of the Cold War. [Boris Yeltsin was the first known Russian/Soviet Union commander-in-chief to ever be handed the infamous "black suitcase" after an atmospheric research satellite was mistaken for an incoming US missile targeting Moscow. He had just minutes to decide whether to launch a retali-

tory strike, when fortunately the missile trajectory was calculated to be harmless.] Yet to this day, Russia and the US each keep some 2,000 weapons on high alert, even as Russian control and early warning systems deteriorate (thus making that country all that much more hair-trigger).

One would think it would be US policy to encourage Russia to lower its hair-trigger status and reduce the number of its nuclear weapons. Incredibly, in January 2000 US negotiators encouraged Russia to keep large numbers of nuclear weapons and to keep them on high alert. That way Russia could be assured of overwhelming any future US ballistic missile defense (that defense being technologically dubious to begin with). Russia has even recently offered to cut its strategic nuclear forces to 1,500 if the US were to reciprocate. The American government has yet to respond.

The US promised in the 1970 NonProliferation Treaty to enter into serious negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament. In May 2000, the US renewed that pledge as "an unequivocal undertaking." The new DOE budget is doing the opposite. The so-called Stockpile Stewardship Program is being increased to \$5.3 billion, while Congress is likely to boost it yet more to \$5.8 billion (the Cold War yearly average from 1948 - 1992 was \$4 billion). That program is explicitly seeking to indefinitely preserve nuclear weapons, plus introduce major modifications and possible new designs. In



the midst of this purported "energy crisis," national lab research into renewable energies is being slashed by 36%. Environmental management (EM) programs are being cut by 6%. EM includes both the ongoing management of wastes now being generated from continuing weapons programs and cleanup of the legacy wastes from historic contamination (four years ago DOE quit providing a budget breakdown between the two). Under these EM cuts, cleanup is bound to take a larger hit than waste management. In a number of cases, this means that the federal government will likely renege on legal compliance agreements various states fought hard to win for their own environmental protection. If the past and present history of the nuclear weapons complex has taught us anything, it is that we cannot rely on the full faith and credit of the federal government.



In a nutshell: What the budget means to the Los Alamos National Laboratory

It is being commonly reported that LANL funding is being decreased for 2002. This is not true in substance: the apparent decrease is due to the fact that the one-time supplementary appropriation for addressing the effects of the Cerro Grande fire is coming to its legislated end. Funding for LANL's nuclear weapons programs is being cut from \$1.17 billion in 2001 to \$1.09 billion in 2002. However, this is **virtually certain to be substantially augmented by Senator Domenici**. It has also been reported that funding for plutonium pit production at LANL is being decreased. At first glance this appears to be correct, but is not true because funding is being shifted between different budget categories. In reality, **funding for plutonium pit production has increased** to \$217.6 million for 2002. At the same time, one year after the Cerro Grande Fire, **cleanup is being cut by 15%**. The Rio Grande now faces a threat from the aftermath of the fire because cleanup was nonexistent or ineffective to begin with. Funding for **DOE oversight by NMED was slashed 33%** across our state (LANL oversight is its biggest single component). Remember that NMED provided the first public independent risk information during the fire. Finally, funding for LANL research into renewable energies is being slashed 50%.

Three budget highlights on LANL nuclear weapons facilities:

- \$89.1 million was added for **upgrades to plutonium pit production** facilities;
- \$15 million was added for the conceptual design of the Advanced Hydrotest Facility (AHF). The **AHF (estimated cost \$2 billion)** is the follow-on to the Dual Axis Radiographic Hydrotest Facility (DARHT). This is before DARHT (cost \$280 million) has even come on line. Whereas DARHT will have two radiographic lines of sight for imploding surrogate plutonium pits, AHF will have 6 - 10; it will be **the weapons designer's dream come true**; and
- Funding for upgrades to the Chemical and Metallurgical Research Building were zeroed out. This means that **LANL will now certainly build an advanced plutonium lab** (estimated cost \$860 million) next to the plutonium pit production facility so that the lab can have the "nuclear campus" that it explicitly wants.

Finally, the **LANL wish list** for nuclear weapons facilities costs **\$4.1 billion over the next decade**.



New Employees... Endless Possibilities

Nuclear Watch is very excited about hiring two new full-time staff members. **Colin King** and **Geoffrey Petrie** will be joining us full time in June.

Colin has been an activist since he was 11 years of age, when he created an environmental group in Minnesota. His group helped defeat a proposed hazardous waste incinerator in a neighboring town, and was responsible for nearly 5000 trees being planted. He has been working as an intern with NWNM Director Jay Coghlan for over four years. Colin will be Nuclear Watch's new Technologies Director and Research Co-Director.

Geoff has been working with Nuclear Watch for almost a year now. He came on last summer with the sole mission of creating our web site. Since

that time his other talents have become obvious. He will be taking on the fulltime position of Media Director and Research Co-Director.

Both Colin and Geoff are receiving B.A.s from St. John's College in Santa Fe this May.



They are each pursuing a double major in Western Philosophy and Mathematics. While attending St. John's, Colin has been active in writing articles for the student newspaper about nuclear issues, and Geoff has been the Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper.

With the experience and talent that these two men bring to Nuclear Watch we will be able to accomplish so much more! We need your help, of course. Please help us support our new workers and their new projects!

Our new staff members are youthful and refreshingly well-versed in the classics. (Recent file photos.)

NUKEWATCH WEB SITE: A WORK IN PROGRESS

We have the basics set up.

Attendance per month is increasing exponentially, but there is still a lot of work to do.

We want to hear what you want from: <http://www.nukewatch.org>.

Please give us comments, suggestions, criticisms about the site.

If you haven't checked it out yet, please do!

We are always updating, especially the Media Current Events page where you can find out about Nuclear Watch Television and future shows.

Send your comments to comments@nukewatch.org

or write us at 551 West Cordova Rd.#808, Santa Fe NM 87501.

We're looking forward to hearing from you!



Nukewatch is proud to be an active member of the **Alliance for Nuclear Accountability** (ANA), an alliance of 35 local, regional and national organizations that work together to promote education and action on issues related to the US nuclear weapons complex. These issues include public and worker health and safety, the environment, peace/disarmament, social justice, and government and corporate accountability. The ANA has organized annual DC Days for the past 12 years that brings activists from across the country (and even Russia!) to help educate Congress and the executive branch on nuclear issues that concern their constituencies. This May, Nukewatch's own Geoffrey Petrie is attending his first ANA DC Days. For more on the ANA, please visit www.ananuclear.org.

Nukewatch is just as proud to be an active participant in the **Back From the Brink Campaign** to de-alert nuclear weapons. This campaign is working with citizens and organizations in communities across the US to educate on the need to get nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert. Toward that end, the campaign has recently published the de-alerting briefing book **Short Fuse to Catastrophe** and a professionally produced video **End the Nuclear Threat Now** featuring experts on the de-alerting of nuclear weapons. You can order free of charge; call 1-877-55BESAFE (1-877-552-3723) or write to Back From the Brink Campaign at 6856 Eastern Ave., Suite 322, Washington, DC 20012. Visit their web site at www.backfromthebrink.org!

N u k e T V

Even though the February sweeps have come and gone, Nuke Watch's Must See TV is still all new episodes!

In April we interviewed Susan Dayton, of Citizen Action (<http://www.radfreenm.com>),

on the controversial Sandia Lab waste dump in Albuquerque and pending DOE budget cuts to cleanup;

and Chris Mechels, a retired 11 year employee of Los Alamos National Lab,



Should WIPP Grow? New Mexico Says NO!

More than 700 individuals and a variety of citizen organizations representing more than 10,000 individuals have strongly opposed Department of Energy (DOE) **plans to expand the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP)**. WIPP, the world's first deep underground repository for nuclear waste, received its first shipment of plutonium-contaminated waste on March 26, 1999. DOE is seriously behind its own shipping schedule, another indication of the dump's problems and how it is not achieving its promised results. Major decisions will be made throughout 2001, so **strong public involvement will be essential**.

The greatest outpouring of public opposition was in response to DOE's request to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) to change its operating permit in order to **open waste drums at WIPP** to characterize (determine) what is in the 55-gallon drums. They also asked to expand the storage area of the Waste Handling Building by more than 33 percent and to eliminate the 60-day limit for surface storage. These modifications would make WIPP a **long-term surface storage facility**--a radical departure from its purported mission. For more than 20 years, DOE has stated that it would not open drums at WIPP, but rather that the characterization would be done at generator or interim storage sites.

Many activist and governmental bodies, and private citizens, voiced their opposition to these modifications. Only five commentors, all from Carlsbad, supported the DOE request.

DOE withdrew its request in September 2000, and to date has not re-submitted the request. NMED has committed to considering the public comments received in September when the expected request for the same modifications is re-submitted by DOE some time in the future.

ANOTHER PROPOSED MODIFICATION

In January 2001 DOE requested a class 2 modification to replace visual examination of drums with tomography to characterize WIPP waste. RTR employs x-ray technology to examine waste, while tomography functions in the same way as a CAT scan, providing a more detailed analysis. The use of tomography to characterize waste has so far been tested only once, providing an insufficient track record for use at WIPP.

If approved, DOE may use one machine's cost of \$1,250,000 and 100,000 pound weight, which violates highway weight limitations, to justify **centralizing waste characterization at WIPP**, instead of the sites at which the waste originates. In addition, this replacement in the existing permit would be in place of the currently required safety net of periodic visual examinations to check the accuracy of RTR. For these reasons, Nuclear Watch opposed the modification in formal comments submitted to NMED on April 2. The department was due to decide on this modification by April 24th.

SHIPMENTS TO WIPP

DOE is seriously behind its unrealistic and unsafe schedule to ship wastes to WIPP. Although Congress appropriated more than \$365 million for the past two years with the DOE promise to ship 150 truckloads to WIPP, only 90 shipments actually arrived. Because the majority of trucks were not full, the amount of waste received was equivalent to only 68 truckloads. Congress should hold DOE accountable for not fulfilling its commitments. To date, WIPP has cost more than **3 billion dollars**.

ANOTHER SMALL VICTORY FOR CITIZENS

On November 13, 2000, DOE submitted a request to NMED to change the waste characterization procedure for headspace gas testing. These tests are required for all drums to check the levels of **volatile organic compounds**, which are supposed to be strictly regulated at WIPP. Based on DOE's own studies, the permit requires at least 142 days for gas to collect in the headspace before the test is done. DOE requested a permit modification to reduce the waiting period to a few days or weeks to allow waste to be shipped more quickly to WIPP. NMED rejected the initial request because the change was substantial enough to require public notice and comment.

On December 7, 2000, DOE resubmitted the request and notified the public that comments could be submitted to NMED until February 9. At the same time, DOE asked NMED to give a "temporary authorization" to allow the new procedure to be used immediately. On December 13, NMED approved the temporary authorization. On December 22, after "further analysis" including comments from Southwest Research and Information Center and Nuclear Watch, NMED rescinded the temporary authorization. On March 28, due in large part to activists' involvement, NMED denied the request.

LESSONS LEARNED

DOE has developed a very dangerous operating practice at WIPP. Rather than putting attention and resources into fixing existing problems with WIPP, DOE wants to expand WIPP and weaken regulatory requirements. No matter what modifications DOE gets in the short-term, it will still always want more and more expansion. Only citizen opposition will prevent DOE from succeeding. Other modifications, such as the disposal of PCBs and Remote Handled (too hot for humans to handle) waste may soon be requested. As indicated by the withdrawal of the expansion request in September, the rescission of the temporary authorization in December, and the modification denial in March, citizen involvement and protest **make a difference**.



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mission statement

The mission of Nuclear Watch New Mexico is to provide timely and accurate information to the public on nuclear issues in the American Southwest, and to encourage effective citizen involvement and activism in these issues. We seek to promote greater environmental protection, safe disposition of radioactive wastes, and federal policy changes that will curb the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Inside this issue: Federal Budget Critique, Interns Hired for Real, New BioLab for LANL?

WHAT TO DO! (this month)

The Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP) is the US' Department of Defense's (DoD's) nuclear warfighting plan and target list. It is thought to have over 2,000 targets in Russia alone and may be expanded to meet "new, emerging threats." Congress has never had meaningful access to what could be the most fateful plan that this country could ever implement. Senator Jeff Bingaman has stated that he "supports [NWNM's] conviction that Congress should have access to the SIOP" which is a "necessary prerequisite to engage on major policy questions that need a Congressional perspective." Friends, call or write Senator Bingaman to thank him and ask him to take concrete steps to see to it that Congress gets access.

Related to the SIOP are Nuclear Posture Reviews (NPRs) which set the number of nuclear weapons and the research and production complex deemed necessary to support them. Congress has legislated that DoD release a new NPR before the end of this year, yet Congress has historically held few (if any) hearings on these all-important nuclear policy documents. Senator Bingaman has stated that "it is essential that the Congress have an opportunity to participate in its formulation" and accordingly he will call for hearings. He deserves thanks on this too! And while you're at it, ask him exactly when those hearings might be.

The recently released DOE budget cuts cleanup at Los Alamos 15%, a year after the Cerro Grande Fire! Moreover, that budget cuts funding for DOE oversight by the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) by 33%. Write or call your NM Congressional delegation (especially Senator Domenici) to say that cleanup money should not only be restored but increased. Also, please let NMED Secretary Pete Maggiore know that New Mexico should issue binding cleanup compliance orders to DOE so that we know our environment will be protected.

Tell your senators and congresspeople that nuclear weapons should be globally de-alerted (taken off their hair-trigger status) so that the world can be a safer place! For more information, contact NWNM or the Back From the Brink Campaign (please see p.4 inside).

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