



WATCHDOG

news that bites back

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A Lab's Lengthening Shadow

Los Alamos Slides into Position as a Big Big Nuclear Bomb Factory Draft Environmental Impact Statement Paints Stark Portrait

In our last issue we reported how the Bush Administration seeks to return to producing **improved or newly designed nuclear weapons**, in the Department of Energy's (DOE)'s own words, at "a level of capability comparable to what we had in the Cold War." Meanwhile, the Los Alamos National Laboratory incrementally slouches towards becoming the **permanent bomb factory** for the production of **plutonium pits** (the atomic "triggers" for today's thermonuclear weapons).

The signs are unmistakable. The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), the semi-autonomous nuclear weapons agency within DOE, has issued a new draft Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement (Site-Wide EIS) for Continued Operations of Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). NNSA's "preferred alternative" is expanded nuclear weapons activities at the Labs, which further builds upon--guess what?--the expanded nuclear weapons activities that were approved in an earlier 1999 LANL Site-Wide EIS.

As a part of this acceleration, the NNSA is seeking to sanction through the Site-Wide EIS the **production of up to 80 plutonium pits per year at LANL**. You may recall that pit production formerly took place at the Rocky Flats Plant near Denver, where operations stopped following an FBI raid investigating environmental crimes.

Plutonium is notoriously tricky and dangerous to work with. Since the closure of Rocky Flats there has been no facility capable of turning out mass quantities of pits. Following the Rocky Flats shutdown pit production was relocated to Los Alamos, but with a ceiling limiting production to 20 pits per year. Now the NNSA wants to manufacture up to four times that

amount, although it states that it is seeking only 50 pits "certified" for entry into the nuclear weapons stockpile.

The Senate Subcommittee for Energy and Water Development Appropriations, chaired by New Mexico's Pete Domenici, has recently fully funded the construction of an advanced plutonium facility at LANL called the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Project (CMRR), that will cost up to **one billion dollars** to build. Domenici's Subcommittee is "skeptical" that other new weapons-related plutonium storage and manufacturing facilities can be built anywhere else in the foreseeable future, so by default LANL gets the job.

In the past few years Congress has rejected the "Modern Pit Facility," a proposed new super nuclear bomb factory for resumed industrial-scale plutonium pit production. In response, Domenici's Committee ordered that a report be done by NNSA to study the expansion of CMRR's future mission. As it stands, the CMRR will be physically linked to LANL's existing plutonium pit production facility and will directly support its expanded production. Moreover, according to the Site-Wide EIS, NNSA plans to extend the life of LANL's plutonium pit production facility by 20-30 years. All the while, NNSA continues to claim that production of at least 125 pits per year will eventually be needed. Given all the signs, this could be what LANL is gradually creeping towards (**it's already the second biggest production site** in the nuclear weapons complex).

Expanded pit production means New Mexicans will be subject to greater health and safety risks as we add another 250 cubic yards of radioactive bomb wastes to



Jamie Chase

Lengthening Shadow: LANL Draft Environmental Impact Statement

continued from front page

the 260 cubic yards now generated each year--nearly double. That means 1,800 or more 55-gallon barrels of Los Alamos "transuranic" wastes will be shipped to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in southern New Mexico every year.

The Site-Wide EIS also states that Los Alamos will store up to **6.6 metric tons of "special nuclear materials inventory, mainly plutonium."** In 1994, the Department of Energy admitted that it held 2.7 metric tons of plutonium at LANL. To date, we have found no explanation for the increase. It could be related to the statement in the draft Site-Wide EIS that up to 500 old pits per year could be dismantled at LANL. That may seem good from an arms control perspective, but could be a messy and dangerous operation, one designed to provide the feed material for new pits, as well as plutonium fuel for the proclaimed **pending nuclear energy renaissance.**

Additionally, under expanded nuclear weapons operations, the Lab will annually process **87,000 pounds of high explosives,** and **up to 6,900 pounds of depleted uranium will be blown**

up in weapons-related explosive "dynamic experiments." Highly enriched uranium (2,200 pounds of it) will be used for the fabrication of nuclear weapons components, and 200 reservoirs of tritium (a radioactive isotope of hydrogen used to "boost" nuclear weapons) will be produced each year. Finally, the Site-Wide EIS states that LANL will **receive five to ten shipments of radioactive waste a year from other DOE sites.**

Given the recent change to contract management at the Lab, offering starring roles to private corporations such as Bechtel, there is strong evidence of an accelerating shift to nuclear weapons production. As a result, **the Lab will inevitably lose its veneer as some kind of scientific ivory tower, and will be more clearly seen as the purveyor, designer and producer of weapons of mass destruction that it is.** The Cold War is over. We are now challenged by new national security threats--energy independence and global climate change. New Mexicans need to ask: "Is this relentless focus on nuclear bombs really the best that Los Alamos, the richest county in the U.S., can do?"

Voice your Opinion

The Site-Wide EIS Hearing Schedule...and What You Can Do



Here is your opportunity to make your opinion heard!

Federal law requires that the general public have the opportunity to provide comments on the LANL Site-Wide EIS. The NNSA will consider your comments in the preparation of the Final LANL Site-Wide EIS.

Written comments must be postmarked or e-mailed to LANL_SWEIS@doeal.gov by September 5.

Prefer to speak out in person?

Three public hearings to receive oral comments will also be held at the following locations in New Mexico:

- **Tuesday, August 8** 6:30 - 9:30 p.m., Fuller Lodge (Pajarito Room), 2132 Central Avenue, Los Alamos
- **Wednesday, August 9** (*Nagasaki Day*) 6:30 - 9:30 p.m., Northern New Mexico Community College (Eagle Memorial Sportsplex), 921 Paseo de Oñate, Espanola
- **Thursday, August 10** 6:30 - 9:30 p.m., Santa Fe Community College (Main Building, Jemez Rooms), 6401 Richards Avenue, Santa Fe

Comments can also be recorded or more information requested by calling 1-877-491-4957.

For additional information or to download the Site-Wide EIS: <http://www.doeal.gov/laso/nepa/sweis.htm>.

Want your own copy of the Environmental Impact Statment?

Copies of the Draft LANL Site-Wide EIS are available for review at:

- The Los Alamos Outreach Center, 1619 Central Avenue, Los Alamos, New Mexico, 87544
- Northern New Mexico Citizens Advisory Board, 1660 Old Pecos Trail, Suite B in Santa Fe
- Zimmerman Library, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131.

Read/download from the website of DOE's Los Alamos Site Office: <http://www.doeal.gov/laso/nepa/sweis.htm>.

Or, get a copy by writing to: National Nuclear Security Administration, Los Alamos Site Office, Attn: Ms. Elizabeth Withers, Office of Environmental Stewardship, 528 35th Street, Los Alamos, New Mexico, 87544; or by fax: (505) 667-5948; or by e-mail at: LANL_SWEIS@doeal.gov.



Stay tuned to Nuclear Watch's web site at www.nukewatch.org for updates and sample citizen comments by August 30. Also, we are pressuring NNSA to extend the deadline for public comment to October 5!

Stopping the Divine Strake Test



A planned huge explosion called the Divine Strake Test scheduled for June 2, 2006, at the Nevada Test Site (NTS) was canceled due to massive public protests and citizen and Tribal legal challenges.

Faced with intense scrutiny from Congress and state regulatory agencies, the National Nuclear Security Agency (NNSA) withdrew its approval and indefinitely postponed it.

The NNSA and the Department of Defense's Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) had planned the test as a means to calibrate underground shock effects on tunnels and below-ground bunkers. The blast would have detonated 700 tons of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil (ANFO) in a 32-foot diameter hole. According to DTRA budget documents, the purpose of the test was to "develop a planning tool that will improve the warfighter's confidence in selecting the smallest nuclear yield

necessary to destroy underground facilities while minimizing collateral damage." The physical center of the mass of ANFO was also to be placed at the same depth that U.S. earth-penetrating nuclear weapons are capable of penetrating. Finally, the test would have occurred against the backdrop of President Bush's declaration that all options are on the table when it comes to dealing with alleged Iranian nuclear weapons facilities.

Divine Strake met with very strong opposition from protesters at the NTS and by challenges in court. Two Western Shoshone Tribes and Nevada and Utah downwinders who were exposed to fallout from past nuclear tests filed a lawsuit that challenged the adequacy of DTRA's "Finding of No Significant (environmental) Impact." Because the Nevada Test Site has had some 900 full-scale nuclear weapons tests, the lawsuit alleged the Divine Strake explosion could resuspend contaminated soil and put downwind populations at resumed risk.

Watch NukeWatch TV Sunday evenings at 7:30

Our half-hour "Hot Topics" program:
Santa Fe Public Access (cable) Channel 16

NukeWatch TV coming to: Albuquerque;
Taos; Los Alamos; and Silver City, NM !!

You may request a specific show or a list
of currently available FREE programs on
DVD by sending email to:
DVD@nukewatch.org

NukeWatch TV will be available this
August via streaming media from our
award-winning website:
www.nukewatch.org



Visit the website often for frequently updated articles and fact sheets on Los Alamos, the Nuclear Weapons Complex, and nuclear waste issues. We also post related news stories and our NukeWatch Reports series of audiocasts.

If you would like to receive an electronic (pdf) version of the *Watchdog*, please go to www.nukewatch.org and click "Mailing List" in the left hand pane. Enter your information to be added to our e-mail list for notifications of new issues. (Your info will not be shared with anyone.) Go to <http://www.nukewatch.org/watchdawg/index.html> to download back issues.

Free DVDs! (Donations appreciated nonetheless.)

For a DVD of the NukeWatch-TV program, "Los Alamos' Site-wide EIS and Expanding Nuclear Weapons Programs" please email DVD@nukewatch.org and ask for the Site-Wide EIS program.

For DVDs of the NukeWatch-TV documentary series on Divine Strake please email DVD@nukewatch.org and ask for the "Stop Divine Strake" program.

And for all you old-fashioned, non-emailing types, call to request these programs at: 505-989-7342...

...or write us at Nuclear Watch of New Mexico, 551 W. Cordova Rd. #808, Santa Fe, NM 87505.



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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.

***In This Issue: Los Alamos Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement Released in Draft Form;
How You Can Review and Offer Public Comment on the Draft SWEIS;
Divine Strake Stopped in its Tracks by Earthly Citizens; Free DVDs and More!!***

What to do

We need a lot of public commentary on the Draft Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement--on the scary future the big boys are planning for Los Alamos Laboratory.

Read the article (cover and page 2) and choose a hearing date at which to speak, or plan to submit written comments. Or, better yet, plan to voice your concerns in person *and* on paper!

Let us assist you in preparing your comments! We will have sample citizen testimony available on our website, as well as all our ever-popular fact sheets and previous *Watchdog* articles dealing with nuclear weapons manufacturing issues from a wide range of environmental and proliferation standpoints.

Show us how warm and fuzzy you feel about the work we do, by sending us cold, hard, clinical cash--whatever amount. Donations large and small keep us pointed in the right direction. The right balance between "lean and mean" depends on your participation!



nuclear watch new mexico

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