

nuclear watch new mexico

# WATCHDOG

news that bites back



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## DOE's Complex Transformation Plan "Consolidation" Means Beefed-Up Bomb Production

Americans overwhelmingly support dramatic reductions in the nation's nuclear arsenal. Yet the US Department of Energy habitually pushes hard to design and manufacture new flavors of H-bombs. How to reconcile these opposing impulses? Shuffle functions around from one facility to another, quietly pump up manufacturing capabilities, stick most of the dangerous bomb materials in New Mexico, and sell these changes to the public as a leaner, meaner—no, a kinder, greener weapons complex. "Look how many weapons we've dismantled over the last decade," says DOE. "Reward us! Let us build expensive new facilities where we make new bombs, or rather, where we would *have* the capability of making new bombs, if, ahem, we need to..."

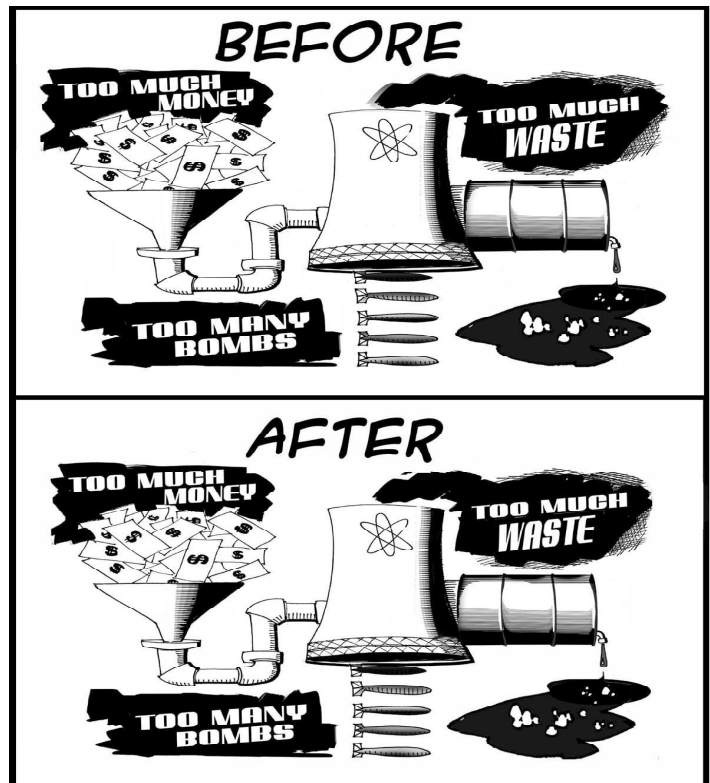
Yes, it's that time again. The time when nukes programs that have been repudiated by Congress and the public get resuscitated, re-named, re-packaged and sent out on tour looking for support. DOE's nuclear weapons arm, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), is wrapping up a sequence of public comment hearings (as required by the National Environmental Policy Act, not because they're dying to hear from us) on their draft "Complex Transformation" Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement. Rejected concepts of the past decade, such as the Modern Pit Facility and Consolidated Plutonium Center, can be heard echoing throughout the new plans.

Anyone who endured the NNSA's PowerPoint presentation at the recent hearings heard a lot about a stripped-down, "consolidated" complex. But to *get* that smaller footprint—which doesn't actually close any existing sites, just moves their most dangerous programs to Los Alamos National Lab—we are supposed to welcome the birth of a new multi-billion dollar manufacturing complex capable of producing 80 or more plutonium pits, or bomb triggers, per year. (In fact, LANL has hired a major PR firm to push just that.) The echoes heard loudest are those of the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) program, which was severely undercut in Congress by the complete refutation of its original rationale, alleged pit aging problems. Independent analysts concluded that pits last a century or more. NNSA then began the hard work of re-packaging RRW to keep it alive (see "Fog," p.3). The only reason this nation could possibly "need" to manufacture 80 or more pits a year is for these new weapons—which we now know we *don't* need. We

have some 15,000 pits stored at the Pantex Plant in Amarillo, and that facility is authorized to "re-use" up to 350 of the pits annually if needed.

The new configuration NNSA wants *isn't* a forward-looking vision that anticipates future geopolitical dynamics under a new Administration. It is instead a desperate attempt to cash in on what's left of the *carte blanche* offered by the weapons-friendly Bush Administration as it limps through a final lame-duck year. The basis for this "new" configuration of the nation's nukes plants is the woefully outdated 2001 *Nuclear Posture Review*, soon to be replaced; Congress has mandated that the new Administration release an update. Not only does the 2001 *Posture Review* heavily promote the Bush Administration's now-discredited pre-emptive war philosophy, it applies that doctrine to nuclear warfare with visions of "usable" tactical battlefield nukes—a specter that has found support neither on the Hill nor on the streets.

*continued on page 2*



Jamie Chase

When the new Administration draws up its revised *Nuclear Posture Review*, that document will incorporate the findings of a 12-person bilateral commission that Congress is currently empaneling to issue a report by December 1st of this year. Called the "Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States," this bipartisan consortium of experts is sure to have plenty to say about national nuclear strategy for the near and far future, and how DOE's infrastructure can best support that strategy.

Why not let this commission's findings, and the new Administration's *Nuclear Posture Review* reflecting them, come to light before we rush into a billion dollars here and a billion dollars there for new or revamped facilities, not to

mention a billion dollars or more annually to run these new facilities? These are sweeping (inter)national policy decisions, but New Mexico will pay dearly, on a very local level, in water and environmental contamination if these changes come to pass. (See below for some regional impacts.)

Yes, DOE is once again selling us a bill of goods. In classic Orwellian style, they use language to disguise rather than to reveal. While pumping steroids into their pit-production infrastructure, they try to tell us the new configuration serves disarmament. Don't fall for it. To learn more, visit us at [nukewatch.org](http://nukewatch.org), then please send your comments to [complextransformation@nnsa.doe.gov](mailto:complextransformation@nnsa.doe.gov) ...and soon!

--Sasha Pyle

**Alarmed? E-mail your comments by 4/10 to [complextransformation@nnsa.doe.gov](mailto:complextransformation@nnsa.doe.gov)**

## ***Pits Forever, Risks Forever We Asked for a Trim...Not a Permanent!!***

**what happens at LANL?**

Now that Los Alamos National Laboratory is the "preferred" site for permanent pit production, what else comes with this dubious distinction? **Also permanent: wasted tax dollars, increased risk to the public, increased water use, and increased waste production.** Plus, this shift works against cleanup and possible Lab mission diversification into other urgent national security issues, such as WMD proliferation, port security, energy independence and climate change.

The proposed "Complex Transformation" calls for LANL to produce 50 to 80 pits per year. **Let's take a look at some regional impacts of this "50/80 Alternative."** (Some of the other alternatives offered carry even greater estimated impacts and increased risks.)

To produce 80 pits per year, LANL needs a new facility. Construction is estimated at over \$2 billion for the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) project, the facility intended to directly support pit production at LANL. The annual cost for operating facilities at LANL's expanded plutonium complex, for which CMRR is the keystone, will be \$240 million per year. Separately designated pit production costs will double that. Add in annual security costs--\$45 million. **Bottom line for beefed-up plutonium pit production at LANL? Try a half-billion dollars per year, and that's without facility construction and upgrades.**

A serious seismic event at LANL would cause widespread damage. Facilities would be affected; the public and workers would risk both radioactive and chemical exposure. A recent seismic study predicts 50% greater ground motion than previously believed. With a seismically fragile water supply system, sustained fires may occur. The accident with the highest postulated consequences to the offsite population is this combined earthquake/fire scenario. A projected 26 "Latent Cancer Fatalities" in the offsite population could result within a

50-mile radius. Earthquakes are rare events, but isn't building plutonium facilities in a seismically vulnerable zone literally playing with fire?

The 50/80 Alternative would **boost LANL's annual water use by about 12 percent--an increase of 43,000,000 gallons.** Water is northern New Mexico's most precious resource. In an uncertain future, why should more water be devoted to unneeded bomb production?

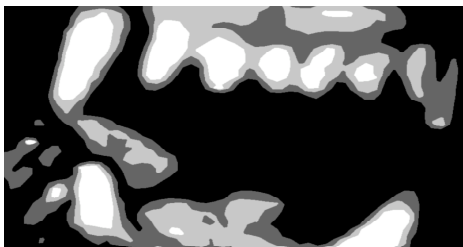
This Alternative will also generate an additional **575 cubic yards of radioactive transuranic (TRU) waste per year, triple the amount LANL produced in 2005.** Could this increasing TRU waste be shipped to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in southern New Mexico? Nope, there's no room. WIPP is about 40% full now, and the remainder is already spoken for. Plus, the CMMR is slated to operate for 30 years *after* WIPP closes in 2035. Where will all these bomb-wastes go?

The 50/80 Alternative will also generate about **1,850 cubic yards of "low-level" radioactive wastes each year.** These would be processed at the Solid Waste Management Facility in TA-54 and disposed of on-site at TA-54's Area G. But Area G itself is due to close in 2015. There's still time for the public to push the New Mexico Environment Department to require that LANL remove this waste rather than "cap and cover" and leave it in place--as the Lab plans. However, LANL also plans to expand Area G into "Zone 4," which will be more of the same--unlined dumps above our aquifer that will likely leave radioactive wastes permanently.

But wait, there's more!! The 50/80 alternative will **more than double LANL's already huge annual generation of chemical wastes** (the Lab generated 217 tons in 2005).

Obviously, potential risks posed to New Mexicans by the ramped-up pit production at LANL will far exceed those briefly touched on here. Stay tuned at [nukewatch.org](http://nukewatch.org) for new info.

--Scott Kovac



## PakNukeFlack

During the rioting in Pakistan that followed the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in late December, some analysts and military planners in the U. S. continued to fret about the Pakistani nuclear arsenal. Worried that the weapons might pose a terror threat if Taliban or Al Qaeda militants gained access to the locations where they are stored, scenarios and solutions for securing the arsenal began to circulate. Frederick Kagan of the American Enterprise Institute, a pro-Bush think tank which was the intellectual architect of the Iraq troop surge, reportedly proposed sending U.S. or British special ops troops in to "secure" the nukes from the Pakistanis guarding them, and take them to a secret storage facility in New Mexico.

## NukeFlakBack

In January a Pakistani general expressed concern about U. S. procedures for storing and handling nuclear weapons. He was referring to the August 2007 incident in which six nuclear-armed cruise missiles were accidentally mounted on a B-52 at Minot AFB, ND and flown to Barksdale, LA--without the Air Force or the flight crew realizing that nukes were on board. Brigadier General Iqhman went on to add that Pakistan's government would be willing to offer technical advice and assistance to the U.S. on nuclear weapons handling procedures. In response, a senior Pentagon official reportedly said it is the U. S. role "to give, not receive advice on nuclear weapons safety."

## NATO Rogues

Apparently rejecting the principle of non-nuclear resolution of all international conflicts, retired military leaders from the U.S. and several European countries penned a manifesto urging western nations to keep pre-emptive nuclear strike options. The authors wrote, "The first use of nuclear weapons must remain in the quiver of escalation as the ultimate instrument to prevent the use of weapons of mass destruction." They were apparently oblivious to the irony of that statement.

## Off-Axis IPP

The Initiatives for Proliferation Prevention was established under DOE in 1994 to fund jobs for former Soviet scientists with nuclear/WMD experience who might be tempted to sell their expertise to terrorists. Congressmen Dingell and Stupak are raising concerns that the IPP program is funding work on Iran's Bushehr reactor. Mr. Dingell said to the *NY Times* in February, "Only this administration would complain about proliferation in Iran, as part of President Bush's Axis of Evil, and then finance it with American taxpayer dollars." Separately, a recent GAO report calls on DOE to develop more accurate ways to evaluate the Russian scientists and projects and to re-evaluate the program, including identifying an exit strategy.

## Fearing the Fog

After NNSA's rationale *du jour* for a new generation of nuclear weapons was undercut by the JASON pit lifetime study, the agency began sowing seeds of doubt about the reliability of an exotic aerogel substance named "Fogbank." It is used in the W76, the single most common weapon in the US nuclear arsenal, and the mainstay of the British stockpile. The Life Extension Program for these weapons has reportedly hit a snag because the Y-12 Plant in Tennessee has faced "major technical challenges" with Fogbank while refurbishing the weapon's secondaries. NNSA Administrator Tom D'Agostino told the Energy and Water Development Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee "we are spending a lot of money as part of the [LEP] in making — trying to ... produce that material, and we are not out of the woods yet." Well, at least they're spending the money.

--John Witham

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We work for you, through advocacy in New Mexico and Washington, D.C., public education, litigation, research and active participation at hearings.

We could use some kibble.

If you didn't send us a (tax-deductible) check during the holidays, we'd wag for one now.

Plus, we can now take PayPal credit card gifts on our website!

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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: Nuclear Weaponers Promote Their "Complex Transformation" Agenda: Why It's Not Really a Transformation; Some Potential Regional Risks It Brings; Pit Production Fact Sheet; and Our Ever-Popular DawgBites***

**Oh thank you thank you!**

**A Big Round of Applause to:**

**Secretary Ron Curry at the New Mexico Environment Department**

Here's what he said about DOE plans to base permanent plutonium pit manufacturing at Los Alamos, bringing all the risks and wastes to New Mexico:

"At a time when DOE is coming up short on needed cleanup funding at Los Alamos, we shouldn't even be talking about increased production of plutonium pits. Addressing and correcting LANL's legacy of pollution should be job number one for the lab. That is why we put a state-enforceable fence-to-fence cleanup order in place in 2005. Before it looks at new missions, the lab must meet its cleanup commitments to the people of New Mexico....They can't expect the citizens of New Mexico to continue to potentially be exposed to new pollution when their 60-year legacy of contamination remains unaddressed. They must fully fund and implement the cleanup order before any new missions are considered. It is the lab's legal and moral responsibility to implement that order."

**Our Thanks to New Mexico's Own Sen. Jeff Bingaman & Rep. Tom Udall**

They've asked DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration to extend the public comment period beyond April 10th (and into July) for the Complex Transformation Draft Environmental Impact Statement (see p.1). If they succeed, we'll have more time to write and send e-mails or letters on the controversial nuclear weapons complex reconfiguration, and more time to recruit our friends and neighbors to write. To see how this turns out, please check our website, [nukewatch.org](http://nukewatch.org).

**And...Thanks to all who spoke at the Complex Transformation Hearings**

Don't forget! E-mail your written comments to [complextransformation@nnsa.doe.gov](mailto:complextransformation@nnsa.doe.gov) First, check at [nukewatch.org](http://nukewatch.org) to see if Sen. Bingaman and Rep. Udall succeeded in getting the deadline extended. If so, great! If not, make sure to submit them by April 10th. Thanks!



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