

nuclear watch new mexico

# WATCHDOG

news that bites back



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## Washington Rains on Lab's Parade Los Alamos Spanked Hard for Management Lapses

Communities near nuclear weapons facilities have always been a bit nervous--and rightly so. Every site in the nation's weapons complex is guilty of pollution and releases. Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), birthplace of the bomb, once enjoyed a special aura as a lofty theoretical establishment, not just a dirty factory. The "city on a hill" was a cozy government/academia partnership; the University of California ran the place. That image was altered with the introduction of for-profit partner, corporate giant Bechtel (with its own history of safety problems--see [www.citizen.org/documents/profile-bechtel.pdf](http://www.citizen.org/documents/profile-bechtel.pdf)). But this quasi-privatization hasn't paid off for the public. A long litany of safety and security embarrassments at the Lab--which would be comical if it weren't so downright scary--continues unabated.

At the same time, LANL's descent down the slippery slope from prestigious research facility to big bomb factory continues to gather speed. That's what DOE's hyped "Complex Transformation" is all about (see our last issue).

It's not just folks downstream of the Lab worrying about problematic policies and sloppy management. It seems a few players in Washington, D.C. have finally been jolted from their complacency into alarm. The investigative arm of Congress, Government Accountability Office (GAO), recently released reports assailing the Lab's security deficiencies and showing little need for increased plutonium pit production with its related new facilities at LANL--which will cost billions if allowed.

We say little if any pit manufacturing is needed. DOE has always claimed that it needed to produce spare W88 pits since Rocky Flats (the former production site) was so abruptly shut down by an FBI raid investigating environmental crimes. However, the GAO report reveals that a 2007 NNSA memo established a *total production requirement of just 31 new W88 pits--not annually but over an unspecified long-term period.*

LANL produced eleven W88 pits in 2007. At that rate they could probably reach the goal of 31 pits in a couple of years,

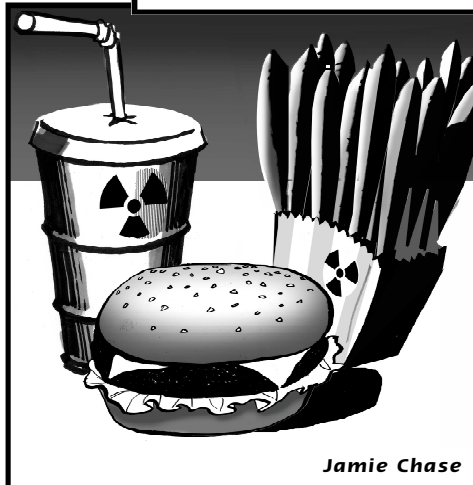
without spending billions to enhance production capability. For other types of pits in the stockpile the Pantex Plant is authorized to "reuse" up to 350 pits per year--far cheaper and environmentally safer than making new pits, as Pantex

itself boasts. Arching above all, in 2006 a panel of independent experts concluded that pits in our current stockpile last 100 years or more (the oldest are now 30 years old). Nevertheless NNSA wants Los Alamos capable of making 80 pits per year, and that's code for *new-design nukes--so-called Reliable Replacement Warheads (RRW).*

In part because of effective citizen activism (including ours), Congress has refused to fund RRW for two consecutive years. Not only is expanding production beyond the currently sanctioned level of 20 pits per year totally unnecessary, it also becomes a grave liability for economic, environmental and global proliferation reasons.

**"[Los Alamos National Lab is] ...run more like a corner hamburger stand than the crown jewel of the nation's nuclear weapons program."**

**Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX)**  
House Energy & Commerce ranking member



Jamie Chase

If LANL gets over its infatuation with pit production, what truly useful things could its plutonium complex do? Here's our answer: begin disassembling the 15,000 "excess" or "strategic reserve" pits at Pantex.

A decade ago LANL developed an "Advanced Recovery and Integrated Extraction System" (ARIES) for removing plutonium from pits. It was designed for a proposed facility at NNSA's Savannah River Site, but that facility is still years away and faces growing financial uncertainty. Los Alamos should utilize ARIES to accommodate disassembly of up to 500 pits per year. Extracted plutonium should then be immobilized to prevent refabrication into a weapon.

Sadly, the current planned use for this plutonium is to use it as feedstock for "Mixed Oxide" (MOX) fuel for commercial

**Spanking LANL** *cont'd from p.1*

nuclear power reactors. MOX is wildly expensive; it menaces the environment and threatens global nonproliferation efforts by injecting plutonium into international commerce. It also smacks of public welfare for private nuclear utilities, rarin' to go on their "nuclear renaissance" and already promised fat subsidies. With MOX they'll pay little or nothing for reactor fuel.

LANL's plutonium scientists should master proliferation-proof plutonium "immobilization" while scaling up ARIES to dismantle pits irreversibly. Disassembly and immobilization of plutonium from weapons--now *there's* a worthy national security mission!

-- Jay Coghlan, Sasha Pyle

**"World War II was prosecuted in less time than it is taking DOE and its contractor to bring a robust security system into force at this nuclear weapons lab."**

--Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich)

Read the GAO reports and our press releases at [www.nukewatch.org](http://www.nukewatch.org).

## Congress Reluctant to Fund New Nukes

Is it possible? Was Washington wowed by our cool logic? NukeWatchers joined dozens of other nuclear activists at "DC Days" in April (as we do annually) with our national coalition, the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability. We asked Congress to slash funding for new nukes. And they did.

In June, House Appropriations voted to cut the nuclear weapons budget to \$6.2 billion, down from the Administration's \$6.6 billion request.

Subcommittee Chairman Peter J. Visclosky's strong words:

"This year, the Committee again reiterates that before considering funding for most new programs, substantial changes to the existing nuclear weapons complex, or funding for RRW [the Reliable Replacement Warhead], the following...must be completed:

- First, replacement of the Cold War era strategies with a 21st Century nuclear deterrent strategy sharply focused on today's and tomorrow's threats that is capable of serving the national security needs of future Administrations and future Congresses without the need for nuclear testing.
- Second, determination of the size and nature of the nuclear stockpile sufficient to serve that strategy.
- Finally, determination of the size and nature of the nuclear weapons complex needed to support that future stockpile."

Fine rhetoric aside, this year's appropriations process is a train wreck. Congress seems increasingly inclined to let the next president help determine the budget for FY 2009, which begins October 1. A "Continuing Resolution" (or CR) is when Congress reverts to the previous year's funding levels in lieu of passing a new budget. They'll probably pass a CR, just as they did last year, when Senate and House hammered one out in conference, and House members prevailed in eliminating funding for the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW). A new CR would thus mean that RRW has been blocked for two consecutive years. Added good news: the Senate also eliminated any RRW money for FY 2009, so politically the program is dead for the next fiscal year no matter who wins the presidency. Neither Barack Obama nor John McCain has permanently ruled out RRW, but two years of Congressional rejection should sound the death knell for these proposed new nukes.

## Looking for shop space?

Why not consider renting a room in Los Alamos National Laboratory's proposed new 200,000 square foot nuclear facility? A federal agency that provides safety oversight of the nuclear weapons complex recently described the design of this facility as a "hotel concept." The proposed facility is part of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) project purportedly needed to support expanded pit production at LANL. However, because of unknowns about future pit production, and instead of designing a smaller building or trying to consolidate into another building, the proposed CMRR design now calls for a flexible, open floor plan to accommodate "as-yet unknown future missions" to fill this king-sized space.

Without expanded pit production, it seems there could be a lot of extra space in

CMRR--but it won't come cheap. CMRR is now estimated to cost \$2.6 billion, if completed as planned. It consists of two buildings adjacent to the Lab's existing plutonium production plant. In addition to the proposed nuclear facility, another 200,000 square foot building, an office and light laboratory facility, is already under construction. Together, these two buildings are intended to replace the existing 500,000 square foot plutonium lab, the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research (CMR) facility. In addition to pit production support, the new CMRR would replace CMR's mission of analyzing existing warhead pits.

But wait a minute! Without expanded pit production, there's no need for the new CMRR at all! Independent studies on the actual missions and needed floor space must be conducted before LANL is allowed to build the five-star plutonium facility of its dreams.

--Scott Kovac





## At KCP: Have They Got a Deal

For a couple of years the NukeWatch watchdogs have been barking about the Kansas City Plant (KCP), that oft-overlooked eighth site in NNSA's weapons complex. KCP builds or acquires the non-nuclear parts of weapons in the nuclear arsenal. Lately we're objecting to efforts to build a new plant instead of consolidating KCP operations at another existing site. We're also tracking the plans (or lack thereof) to remediate Cold War pollution at the old site, owned by the General Services Administration (GSA).

In June the *Kansas City Star* reported that the GSA intends to try to sell the old Kansas City Plant "as is" despite the 300-acre site's contamination by PCBs, volatile organic compounds and toxic beryllium. At this time, there are no plans for effective cleanup. NNSA prefers to relocate manufacturing to a shiny

new plant that the GSA is angling for a private developer to build a few miles away. As to the polluted old site, GSA's Brad Scott is confident they can sell this "prime piece of real estate."

What dupe would assume responsibility for that legacy lurking underground? The Energy Department made this mess; they should clean it up before passing it off or wasting our tax dollars on a new site. --John Witham

## (Nukes) Huh, What Are They Good For?

This year the Air Force has been under scrutiny for how it handles the seemingly superfluous nukes that are its burdensome Cold War legacy. There have been official investigations into how 6 warheads were unknowingly flown cross-country and how 4 nuclear-missile fuses ended up in Taiwan. As if that weren't embarrassing enough, the disposition of several hundred other nuclear weapon parts is unknown and an Air Force commission found security "substandard" for some of the U.S. B-61 bombs deployed at European military bases under a NATO accord.

The Cold War is over. Replacing and keeping secure large numbers of nukes no longer makes economic sense. Nuclear weapons do not address current threats; they've become a liability. Having thousands deployed does not make us any safer (or deter any aggressor that can be deterred) than reducing the arsenal to a few hundred. In fact, with the rise of terrorism and non-state aggressors, nukes even in "friendly" hands are dangerous. These recent events prove the prospect of a weapon being stolen, mishandled or misplaced is becoming increasingly likely.

We must work with other nations to reduce the odds of terrorists getting their hands on nuclear materials. Citizens must pressure the government to honor international agreements to reduce our arsenal, to ban nuclear testing and to work globally on securing dangerous materials--including our own bombs. --John Witham

## Atomic Spin

On the May 28 edition of the KTAO radio "Breakfast with Nancy" show, LANL communications director Jeff Berger confirmed that the Lab's new for-profit corporate manager had hired a public relations firm to counter the efforts of local anti-nuke activists and environmental groups. To lure and prep supporters for the Complex Transformation public hearings this past spring, the Lab chose Burson-Marsteller (B-M)--one of the largest, most experienced PR firms in the world. In the past, B-M has been hired to counter negative press for the **Three Mile Island** mishap in 1979; the **Bhopal** tragedy in 1984; and the **Exxon-Valdez** oil spill in 1989. Their illustrious client list also includes **Blackwater...and now Los Alamos National Security, LLC.**

B-M's website gushes: "We make your story personally relevant and compelling to each targeted audience segment, and we win the competition for that audience's hearts and minds by reaching them multiple times, through multiple 'trusted sources.' In cities around the globe, our people are well-connected with traditional influencers, including government officials and operatives, influential journalists, and non-governmental organizations. At the same time, our professionals are well-versed in influencing online influencers, an essential component to almost any winning public affairs strategy." Translation: counter local grass-roots with corporate Astroturf.

In *Burson-Marsteller: PR for the New World Order*, Carmelo Ruiz summed it up: "Using the latest communications technologies and polling techniques, as well as an array of high-level political connections, PR flacks routinely 'manage' issues for government and corporate clients and 'package' them for public consumption. The result is a 'democracy' in which citizens are turned into passive receptacles of 'disinfotainment' and 'advertorials' and in which critics of the status quo are defined as ignorant meddlers and/or dangerous outsiders. The effect of PR firms should not be underestimated."

What's next? TV commercials with famous actors?

  
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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 Lab Gets a Spanking from the Nation's Capital;  
Congress Feeling Stingy toward New Nukes; "Hot" Properties for Rent and Sale;  
and Our Ever-Popular DawgBites***

**thank you!**

**To Barack Obama for his inspiring words to 200,000+ folks in Berlin:**

The two superpowers that faced each other across the wall of this city came too close too often to destroying all we have built and all that we love. With that wall gone, we need not stand idly by and watch the further spread of the deadly atom. It is time to secure all loose nuclear materials; to stop the spread of nuclear weapons; and to reduce the arsenals from another era. This is the moment to begin the work of seeking the peace of a world without nuclear weapons.

**To John McCain for his May speech at the University of Denver:**

A quarter of a century ago, President Ronald Reagan declared, "Our dream is to see the day when nuclear weapons will be banished from the face of the Earth." That is my dream, too... We do, quite literally, possess the means to destroy all of mankind. We must seek to do all we can to ensure that nuclear weapons will never again be used.

**Thank you to everybody that submitted public comments on the Weapons Complex Transformation. NNSA received over 100,000. That's a powerful demonstration that we were paying attention and that we care. If you spoke at the hearings, double thanks.**



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