



BRIGHT FUTURE FOR THE LAB: NukeWatch Heroically Steps Up to Manage LANL!

The Department of Energy (DOE) has released a draft Request for Proposal (RFP) for the Management and Operations Contract for Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). Following **repeated security and fiscal scandals** DOE decided in April 2003 to open the LANL contract to competition for the first time. The University of California (UC) has operated the Lab since 1943, but its contract expires at the end of September 2005. DOE is accepting public comments on the RFP until January 7th.

We have a comment – **Nuclear Watch New Mexico is the logical choice to manage LANL!** We have intimate knowledge of Lab activities and programs. We have the talent and vision to take Los Alamos Lab robustly and proactively into the future while thinking outside the box so that there will be a new paradigm (see, we even got the necessary lingo down!). Our safety record is unblemished and we have never lost classified materials (we have none).

The RFP calls for using private sector expertise. However, private industry might be gun shy about running this nuclear weapons lab. LANL's troubles handling money, property and security have made it synonymous with scandal, possibly making private companies wary of exposing their shareholders and stock prices to unknown liabilities. Therefore, NukeWatch has a winning edge -- **we just might land the contract by default.**

We can certainly do better than UC. Under its management LANL spent an estimated \$1.3 billion on the production of plutonium "triggers" for the stockpile and has not yet produced one (we, on the other hand, plan to produce no WMDs, hence saving much taxpayers' money). They claimed that a new facility to x-ray imploding mock plutonium pits was absolutely essential for guaranteeing nuclear weapons' safety and reliability. Eight years later, costs have more than doubled--to \$325 million--; half of the facility doesn't work, and all the while they falsely claimed that the project was on budget and schedule. The recent stand down, when they got paid to **not** do their jobs, has cost an estimated \$500 million. Yet year after year UC has received 'excellent' ratings. **With expectations so low, we're confident we can get excellent ratings too!**

Since 1993 about \$700 million has been poured into Lab cleanup, with little to show. In fact, UC did such a lousy job that DOE plans to remove cleanup from the management contract in 2007. Under

NukeWatch management, top priority would be given to **genuine cleanup** (with preference given to in-state contractors) in close cooperation with the State. UC has repeatedly sued New Mexico in order to obstruct mandated cleanup. NukeWatch will, of course, manage the Lab so robustly in a new outside-the-box proactive paradigm that by universal acclaim we shall retain the cleanup contract. **We will not rest until comprehensive cleanup is completed and New Mexico's water resources are permanently protected!**

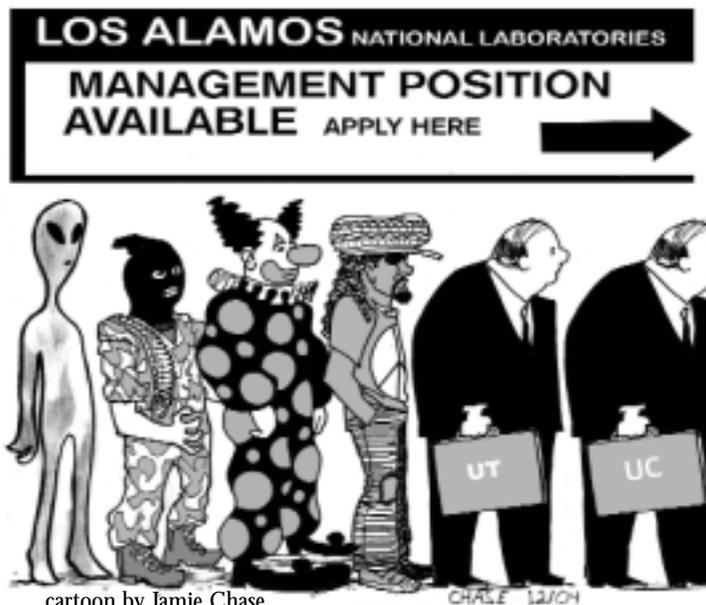
Although NukeWatch is a nonprofit organization, we would voluntarily pay New Mexico gross receipts taxes. This could ultimately provide up to \$80 million annually to the State (almost half of which would go to public education). LANL has never paid taxes to New Mexico because UC is a non-profit.

The RFP requires the retention of LANL's current workforce (excluding top management, which has to be sent packing anyway) and comparable pay and benefits. Although it's not our first choice, having a privileged enclave supported by weapons of mass destruction does help keep taxpayer dollars right here in northern NM. However, given our opposition to the Lab's current mission of preserving nuclear weapons indefinitely and developing new ones (contrary to the 1970 NonProliferation Treaty), we think that a reasonable compromise would be to pay the weaponeers to do nothing. Given the standdown, they already have ample experience in that. The RFP explicitly states that the future contractor shall explore and develop advanced nuclear weapons concepts. **We have an advanced nuclear weapons concept all right – it's long past time to wind the whole business down!**

The essential thrust of NukeWatch management will be to redirect the Lab workforce to more beneficial projects. We will use

those intelligent scientists and expensive facilities for nobler purposes, such as developing renewable energy sources (which now receives \$zilch at the Lab). **We want to tackle real long-term national security problems, such as our energy dependence on other countries and the threat of global climate change.** Remembering that every dollar comes from hard-working taxpayers, we shudder at the thought of wasting a penny on obsolete thinking such as new nuclear weapons development. Come join NukeWatch in the brave new robust proactive future!

--Scott Kovac and Jay Coghlan



Victory! Congress Cuts New Nukes and the New Bomb Plant!

I view the Advanced Concepts research proposal, the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator study, and the effort to reduce the nuclear test readiness posture to 18 months as very provocative and overly aggressive policies that undermine our moral authority to argue that other nations should forego nuclear weapons. We cannot advocate for nonproliferation around the globe and pursue more useable nuclear weapons options here at home.

--Rep. David Hobson (R.-OH), Chairman,
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development

In a stunning victory Congress zeroed out funding for the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator, Advanced Concepts ("mini-nukes") and shortening the lead-time in which to return to full-scale testing. Congress also cut the Department of Energy's request of nearly \$30 million to \$7 million for the new industrial-scale bomb plant called the Modern Pit Facility. All of these cuts occurred because of Rep. David Hobson's determined leadership during negotiations for the recent omnibus appropriations bill, which bundled together thirteen different spending bills that Congress failed to individually pass. As Senator Dianne Feinstein (D.-CA) said: "This is not winning the war by a long shot. But it is a consequential step and should send a very loud message to the administration."

While these cuts are remarkable, Congress still gave U.S. nuclear weapons programs \$44 million more than DOE had asked for, most of which went to major new weapons facilities at the Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories in New Mexico. In fact, spending in Fiscal Year 2005 for the U.S.' core nuclear weapons programs is just some \$200 million under the all-time high set during President Reagan's spectacular military buildup. The U.S. continues to modernize and upgrade its existing nuclear weapons while expanding the rationale for their possible use, all long after the end of the Cold War. Finally, and beware, its proponents could try to piggyback funding for new nuclear weapons and production onto "supplemental appropriations" for the war in Iraq this coming February.

--Jay Coghlan

Lab Stubs Toe on Safely Restarting

In July LANL Director Pete Nanos "stood down" Lab operations because of safety and security concerns. He recently approved restarting the last of the 24 moderate-risk activities. Restart procedures for high risk activities, such as plutonium operations, are underway as well, with nine out of 19 already approved.

But there is some pussy-footing going on. When Nanos suspended operations, certain activities were deemed essential to keep facilities safe, stable and secure. They were allowed to continue without completing the resumption review process. But, because of internal pressures to restart, factions within LANL are increasingly proposing that their programmatic activities be designated "essential" so that they can restart before the review and approval process is finished. In one case, operations at a nuclear facility were initially deemed essential without the director's approval, later to be revoked. The follow-on restart procedure identified a number of serious safety and security issues.

The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB), chartered by Congress to provide independent DOE nuclear oversight, states that to date the LANL resumption process has credibly identified safety issues via the bottoms-up resumption review processes. However, actually realizing safety improvements from the costly stand-down will depend on the Laboratory's ability to manage and resolve systemic problems. Unfortunately, the Laboratory's restart processes remain ill-defined, thus unlikely to decisively steer the Lab's overall priorities.

The restart is getting off on the wrong foot. Since the beginning of October the DOE's Los Alamos Office for federal oversight has cited LANL for 38 violations related to nuclear safety requirements and management procedures for nuclear operations.

We've walked down this road before. Can US taxpayers be assured that their estimated half-billion dollar investment in the stand-down will pay off in real nuts-and-bolts safety and security?

--Scott Kovac

Update: LANL's Technical Area-18



Victory on Los Alamos Criticality Experiments!

In June NukeWatch demanded that "criticality experiments" at Los Alamos National Laboratory's Technical Area (TA)-18 be suspended until long-standing safety issues raised by the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board were resolved. The Safety Board is an independent agency chartered by Congress to oversee safety issues at DOE's nuclear facilities, but has no regulatory power. Criticality experiments use "assemblies" of enriched uranium and/or plutonium to create nuclear chain reactions. TA-18's five critical assemblies differ from nuclear reactors in that the nuclear reactions are not sustained, assuming there are no accidents. They also have no containment or shielding.

The Safety Board had concluded that in an accident one of the assemblies could generate nearly a **700 rem off-site dose** (500 rem is usually fatal). The Board also noted that federal oversight for these experiments had been "minimal." NukeWatch urged the public to contact Senators Domenici and Bingaman, Congressman Tom Udall and Governor Bill Richardson to have them urge DOE to suspend the criticality experiments. Governor Richardson and Congressman Udall did so, and it paid off.

In November the DOE Secretary wrote to Governor Richardson "we have modified TA-18 operational plans at the site. In light of our new schedule, the number of other criticality experiments planned for fiscal year 2005 is significantly reduced, and these operations are scheduled to be completed by summer 2005." Moreover, other DOE documents show that TA-18's critical assemblies (excepting one in cold standby) and three tons of plutonium and highly enriched uranium are to be relocated to the Nevada Test Site by the end of 2005.

Thanks to Governor Richardson and Congressman Udall for raising TA-18's safety issues with DOE! And thanks to other groups, including Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, PeaceAction NM and Creative Commotion, for working on this successful campaign to bring TA-18's criticality experiments to an end. On a sobering note, in October DOE gave TA-18 another notice of a "High Significance" nuclear safety violation, illustrating once again why TA-18 should be shut down.

--Jay Coghlan

Update: Our Bio Lawsuit

In November NukeWatch and Tri-Valley CAREs of Livermore, CA, **filed an appeal** with the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. It challenges a September ruling allowing the DOE to operate an advanced **bio-warfare agents research facility** at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory without a comprehensive environmental impact statement. Last January, under the pressure of our joint litigation, DOE withdrew its previous approval for a similar, already constructed bio-lab at Los Alamos. DOE is expected to release another "environmental assessment" for that facility in February. **Stay tuned!**

For more, please see:
<http://nukewatch.org/facts/nwd/PressRelease110804.pdf>.

Update: WIPP

The hits just keep on coming. First, as we told you last newsletter, the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory sent **over 100 drums** of waste to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) that had been **incorrectly characterized**. Now the Hanford Site in Washington State has reportedly sent WIPP **over 600 drums** of waste that also violated the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) rules.

Those sly dogs at the Department of Energy (DOE) thought that they could get away with sending EPA-restricted waste. Oddly enough, they more or less got away with it. The EPA has decided that the waste now underground at WIPP will stay, but they claim to be serious when they say that no more prohibited waste can go to WIPP. Boy, DOE must be shaking in their boots over that kind of accountability.

The problems with this situation are many. Is it more dangerous to the workers to actually take the waste out of WIPP than it would be to keep it there? The EPA apparently doesn't believe the Hanford waste endangers human health or the environment--but **does EPA really care** about health and the environment?

Another interesting Washington State issue: In the November elections its citizens overwhelmingly passed a ballot initiative preventing more waste from coming to Hanford from other DOE sites until it was able to take care of its own wastes. Well, a federal court has decided that DOE's legal complaint against that initiative has merit, and ruled to put the initiative on hold pending a final decision. So even when the people clearly vote their wishes, DOE tries to find an end run around it.

--Geoff Petrie

Return Address for this mailing: Southwest Research and Information Center PO Box 4524 Albq. NM 87106
551 Cordova Road #808 Santa Fe, New Mexico 87505-4100 Phone: 505.989.7342 Fax: 505.989.7352



nuclear watch new mexico
december 2004

non-profit org.
US Postage PAID
Albuquerque NM
Permit No. 553

Return Service Requested

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: Hey! Put Us in Charge at Los Alamos and See What Happens; Updates on Stand-Down, WIPP, Bio-lawsuit and TA-18; Cuts to New Nukes, Yippee!

It's Been a Year...

since this time last year. Now's the time to make those **end-of-year tax-deductible contributions.**

Admit it, we're probably your very favorite non-profit because nuclear weapons manufacturing is something you think about constantly.

Not really? Send us a check and we'll think about it for you. **You'll have our undying grrrr-attitude.**



Thanks and more for 2004! Special thanks to:

Congressman David Hobson (R.-OH) for his leadership in cutting funding for new nuclear weapons and a new bomb plant in the recent federal appropriations bill, and insisting on our own national integrity while preaching to other countries about WMDs.

New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson for expressing his concerns over Los Alamos's criticality experiments, leading to their cessation in late 2005.

Governor Richardson and Environment Secretary Ron Curry for leading New Mexico towards State-mandated cleanup at Los Alamos, and putting the kabosh on DOE attempts to dump high-level radioactive wastes at WIPP.

Our collegial organizations in the **Alliance for Nuclear Accountability** who help us help ourselves toward greater effectiveness.

Mordechai Vanunu, the Israeli whistleblower, for continuing to speak out against nuclear weapons while risking his recently regained freedom after an 18-year prison sentence.

Our **fundors and contributors great and small** who make our work possible.

And finally, **you**, for giving a damn. Keep voicing your opinions!

nuclear watch new mexico

Staff

Jay Coghlan	Director
Scott Kovac	Operations/Research
Geoffrey Petrie	Media Director

Steering Committee

Mary Lou Cook (Emerita)
Rico Johnson
Shelby Miller
Sasha Pyle
John Stroud
Cathie Sullivan