



WATCHDOG

news that bites back

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BLAST FROM THE COLD WAR PAST

The Bush Administration plans to return to production of improved or newly designed nuclear weapons, in the Department of Energy's words, at "a level of capability comparable to what we had during the Cold War." It **refuses to rule out preemptive war against Iran, including nuclear.** No doubt related, the upcoming "Divine Strake" explosion at the Nevada Test Site aims to fine-tune damage to underground targets. That test will blast **700 tons of ammonium nitrate-fuel oil.** (A mere 2.5 tons destroyed the Oklahoma City Federal Building in 1995). Only nukes have that much destructive force per militarily useful weapon. (For a good time, read our enclosed Divine Strake Fact Sheet.)

The linchpin to the planned American restoration of Cold War capabilities is the "Reliable Replacement Warhead" (RRW) program. While funding RRW, Congress's stated goal was to ensure nuclear weapons reliability. However, **RRW is not needed because the existing stockpile has been proven reliable** after more than 1,000 full-scale tests, unlike the unproven RRW.

RRW is now the tail wagging the dog, being used by the nuclear weapons labs to restore Cold War nuclear weapons capabilities. Consider plutonium pit "trigger" production, formerly done at the notorious Rocky Flats Plant, now re-established and planned for expansion at Los Alamos. The Department of Energy (DOE) states that reliable lifetimes for pit performance are 45 years. However, eminent scientists have long said those lifetimes are **60-90 years, without a determined end date.** Nonetheless, DOE now claims that "even if pits were to last forever", production of 125 pits per year is needed because the Reliable Replacement Warhead is needed, self-justifying logic at best!

Internationally, nuclear weapons policies are rapidly going downhill, arguably largely because of U.S. policies. The Bush Administration **rejected 13 concrete nuclear disarmament steps** the U.S. pledged to at the 2000 NonProliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference. The Administration has refused to submit the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty for ratification, instead **seeking to lower the lead-time for future testing.** It also proposes to **resume industrial-scale reprocessing** of bomb-making nuclear materials (responsible for much of this country's worst contamination), abandoned in 1977 as a terrible proliferation example.

NukeWatch believes Iran and North Korea should be strongly pressured into joining and abiding by a stringent non-proliferation regime. However, **the rules should be applied to all, including the U.S.,** simply because nuclear weapons threaten all.

Conversely, Bush's 2001 "Nuclear Posture Review" specifically targeted Iran and North Korea. Iraq, the remaining "Axis of Evil" member, was preemptively invaded over non-existent WMD programs. Perhaps Iran and North Korea concluded they needed nuclear weapons in order to deter the U.S.

The Bush Administration proposes to reward India, a NPT non-signatory, with a nuclear deal that excludes international inspections of some reactors that could produce weapons-grade materials. The U.S. lifted sanctions against Pakistan for its nuclear weapons tests, and that nation remains unpunished for its chief scientist's global nuclear black market. Israel has never signed the NPT, but has an estimated 400 nuclear weapons, fomenting permanent instability in the Middle East. Russia, largely in response

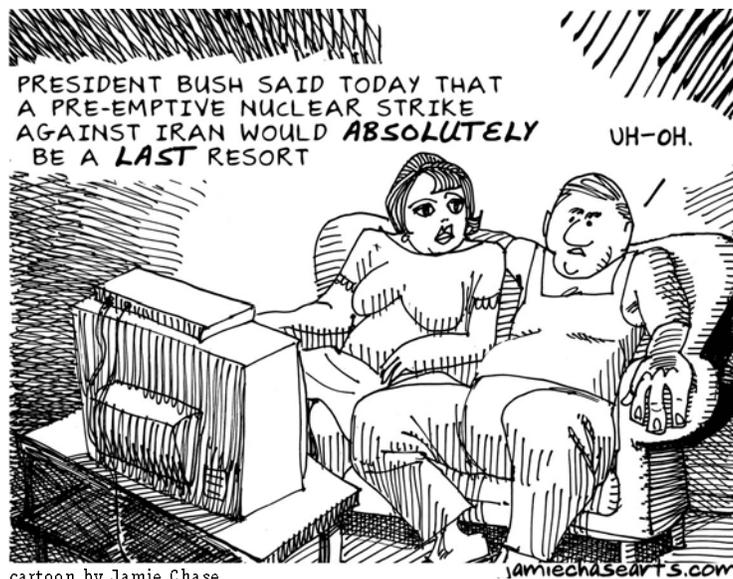
to Bush's unilateral withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, boasts of developing nuclear-armed missiles that are capable of evading U.S. "Star Wars" defenses. France and Russia have both declared they would use nuclear weapons against "terrorists." China is surely aware that the U.S. has shifted the majority of its nuclear-armed submarines to the Pacific, and may build up its arsenal in response. The

United Kingdom has its own parallel RRW program, conducting related explosive plutonium experiments at the Nevada Test Site.

If not reversed, **we are headed for a Cold War II, which could get very, very hot.** Has the world forgotten the Cuban Missile Crisis, Mutually Assured Destruction, and "duck and cover?" It has certainly failed to clean up the **Cold War contamination mess.** The real costs in dollars and health will never be known.

American citizens need to act, given the gross failures of our own government and others. Massive protests in the 1980's compelled Ronald Reagan and Michel Gorbachev to negotiate the total elimination of strategic nuclear weapons. That chance failed because Reagan bought into our own labs' overblown Star Wars claims. These same labs now use RRW as their vehicle for restoring Cold War nuclear weapons capabilities (including the spending and the pollution). Concerned citizens should, could and must act. Our children, grandchildren and neighbors deserve better.

For specific "To-do's", please see last page. Get involved!



cartoon by Jamie Chase

CMRR Facility: What the Heck Is It?

It's an Expensive New Plutonium Facility at Los Alamos, of Course

Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), already the second largest production site in the U.S. nuclear weapons complex, is also designing a new advanced plutonium facility, the **Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement project (CMRR)**. Official cost estimates for this 400,000 square foot project range up to **\$1 billion**. The CMRR project will house operations using radioactive metals, such as plutonium, used in nuclear weapons production.

The CMRR is slated to support increased plutonium pit manufacturing at Technical Area 55 (TA-55), the Lab's consolidated plutonium site. The two will be linked via underground tunnels. A pit is the primary, or "trigger", of a nuclear weapon. This increased capacity will support the proposed next generation of U.S. nuclear weapons under the so-called Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) program. The decision has not yet been made if and how to proceed with RRW. Logically, **CMRR should be put on hold at least until RRW is a well-defined program.**

The Department of Energy (DOE) recently announced plans to consolidate plutonium operations in the nuclear weapons complex. This indicates that the

CMRR would be used to full capacity for only eight years until a future plutonium production center is built. The CMRR facility was scheduled for completion by 2014 at the earliest, and then will have its large inventory of plutonium transferred to the future center by 2022.

A House Appropriations Subcommittee found this type of planning "**simply irrational.**" In a stunning move, the Subcommittee directed DOE to terminate the CMRR project and cut Fiscal Year 2007 construction funding by \$100 million because the location of the new center has yet to be determined. This future center could end up at LANL, *especially* if CMRR is built.

The next step is Senator Domenici's. Before final funding levels are established, House and Senate appropriations need to be reconciled. **Oppose Senate restoration of CMRR funding** under Senator Domenici's leadership and force him to declare the location of the future permanent pit production center.

--Scott Kovac

There's a long list of specific problems with the CMRR.

Please read our fact sheet:

"Cleanup Gets Cut, But Los Alamos Gets a New, Expensive Plutonium Facility," at www.nukewatch.org.

http://www.nukewatch.org/facts/nwd/CMRR_FS_4_21_06.pdf

Water Issues at LANL

Evidence of Lab Groundwater Contamination Continues to Pour Out

In March 2006, Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) reported to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) that chromium was detected in the regional aquifer at 405 parts per billion (ppb). The New Mexico Drinking Water standard is 50 ppb. Much or all of this is the toxic form chromium VI, made "famous" by the *Erin Brockovich* movie. LANL widely used chromium compounds to reduce corrosion in cooling towers, and millions of gallons of chromium-contaminated water were discharged into the Lab's canyons from the 1950s through the early 1970s. An estimated 500,000 pounds of chromium were dumped into the canyons.

LANL has been more than stubborn in acknowledging contamination of our aquifer underlying both Los Alamos and Santa Fe. Beginning in the mid-1980s, the Lab repeatedly asked NMED for waivers from required groundwater monitoring. Lab hydrologists formally claimed that aquifer contamination was impossible because of "impermeable geologic formations." Today, the Lab has been forced to reach the obvious conclusion that the geologic formations under LANL are not impervious. The canyon bottoms provide pathways for water to reach the intermediate and regional aquifers.

The Lab is located between an extinct super-volcano and the Rio Grande rift valley, and naturally has many seismic faults. These faults are believed to be significant recharge pathways to the aquifer. Yet, in a recent hearing with the National Academies of Science, Lab hydrologists downplayed the effects faults may have on contaminated surface water reaching the aquifer.

As late as the end of the 1990's, the Lab was claiming that it would take around 10,000 years for its operations to contaminate the aquifer. This was soon debunked when tritium, perchlorate and high explosives were found in the aquifer. The

newly discovered chromium contamination provides more tangible proof that transport time to the aquifer for some contaminants is a mere 40 to 50 years. In a December 2005 report Lab computer models now estimate these travel times as low as 5 years, depending on location. The report also states, "Future contamination at additional locations is expected over a period of decades to centuries as more of the contamination inventory reaches the water table."

The Lab's official slogan is "The World's Greatest Science Protecting America." We suggest that it ought to start right here at home.

--Scott Kovac



WIPP Battles Continue... Partial Victory on the Dangerous Monster-Mod

permit that the Department of Energy (DOE) had requested. NMED also fast-tracked the public hearing to begin on March 8.

It appeared that the opposition of more than 2,000 people and numerous citizen organizations was being ignored. However, the schedule was delayed--first by a January 11, 2006 letter to NMED from Southwest Research and Information Center (SRIC) that pointed out that the administrative record was not available. Then negotiations were requested, as provided by NMED regulations, to try to resolve at least some comments that were the basis for the public hearing.

After 17 days of negotiations among NMED, DOE and its contractor (with Pete Domenici, Jr. as the lead lawyer), and citizens, including SRIC, Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, and Citizens for Alternatives to Radioactive Dumping (CARD), there are now hundreds of changes to the draft permit. DOE's plan to ship waste to WIPP, and only then "confirm" that it met regulatory requirements, was dropped. The DOE request and draft permit provisions to substantially reduce waste examination was changed so that either x-raying or opening each container is still required. Remote-handled (RH) waste, so radioactive that it requires extensive shielding, will be allowed, though it must be fully examined and repackaged before shipment. The substantial increases in waste storage and disposal capacities were decreased, including about a 40 percent reduction in RH waste.

The public hearing is scheduled for May 31-June 6 in Carlsbad and June 7-9 in Santa Fe. Some of the negotiated changes will be contested by CARD, but NMED, DOE and SRIC will support the revised permit at the hearing. By about late September, NMED Secretary Ron Curry should make a final decision regarding which changes will be included in the permit.

--Don Hancock
www.sric.org

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Santa Fe Public Access (cable) Channel 16.

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affecting New Mexico, the nation and the world.
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All **NukeWatch Reports** are available
for download from www.nukewatch.org.

And check the website for recent media articles,
links, fact sheets and electronic newsletters!

In the last **Watchdog**, we summarized the bad draft "monster modification" permit issued by the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) that incorporated virtually all major changes to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) operating

43% of next year's national \$64 billion budget for developing/testing/producing nuclear weapons will be spent in New Mexico.

Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL)--already the second largest production site in the nuclear weapons complex--is now slated to increase plutonium pit production to **30-50** per year (from 10). In 2007, cleanup of

LANL's contaminated soil will suffer **70%** funding cuts. Meanwhile, more evidence of groundwater contamination continues to come to light.

Funding for nuclear weapons programs at LANL has risen **175%** since the end of the Cold War. As a result, Los Alamos County (in terms of median household income) is now the richest in the US. One in five people in Los Alamos are millionaires. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Los Alamos County is **83%** "white persons, not of Hispanic/Latino origin", while neighboring Rio Arriba County is 87% "minority" and New Mexico is **55%** "minority."

During the long presence of the nuclear weapons industry in this State, New Mexico has slid from **37th** in per capita income in 1960 to **47th** in 2004.

The Air Force has consolidated its nuclear warfighting "brains" at Kirtland Air Force Base, contiguous to Albuquerque. Kirtland also hosts New Mexico's second nuclear weapons design lab, the Sandia National Laboratories, and possibly the world's largest repository of nuclear weapons (about **3,000** intact warheads). The USAF consolidated space weapons research laboratory is located there too.

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to Know These
Fascinating
Factoids





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spring '06

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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: Blast from the Cold War Past/2006 State of Nukes;
Fact Sheet about the "Divine Strake" Explosion; LANL Water Issues; the CMRR Facility;
WIPP Permit Controversy (and Progress); and...Fascinating Factoids!**

"Didja Miss Me?"

OK, this Watchdog comes to you late if we're supposed to publish quarterly. We've been completing some technical upgrades and promise our bark and bite more regularly from now on.

What to do

Donate now! We run a lean, mean NukeWatch machine. But if we want to stay mean, we shouldn't be too lean. Your support is vital to us! Thanks!

Help stop Los Alamos from becoming the nation's permanent pit production plant. **Write or call Senator Pete Domenici.** Tell him to cut funding for the CMRR facility (see page 2). Santa Fe Office: 120 South Federal Place, Suite 302, Santa Fe NM 87501; (505) 988-6511. Or use the Senator's web contact form at: <http://domenici.senate.gov/contact/contactform.cfm>

Los Alamos National Laboratory is due to release two Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) for public comment in June. Watch our website and **help with comments** for the Site-Wide EIS for Continued Operation of the Lab and for the Bio-Safety Level 3 lab EIS.

Citizens should **stay aware of the implications of Divine Strake** and other tests. Write letters to editors and Congressmen expressing your views. For current developments--or to participate in the "Stop Divine Strake Coalition"--visit www.citizenalert.org and www.nukewatch.org.

Once again, **voice your concerns about WIPP.** Public hearings are scheduled for May 31-June 6 in Carlsbad and June 7-9 at the Santa Fe Community College.



nuclear watch new mexico

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