



New Draft LANL Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement is Released
NNSA's Preferred Future for the Lab is
Radically Expanded Nuclear Weapons Programs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, January 10, 2025

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Santa Fe, NM – The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) has finally released its *Draft Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement (SWEIS) for Continued Operation of the Los Alamos National Laboratory*. This is more than two years after it was first announced and sixteen years after the last site-wide EIS. During that time the Lab has become more and more a nuclear weapons production site for the new global nuclear arms race. Accordingly, the central point of the new draft LANL SWEIS is "NNSA has identified the Expanded Operations Alternative as the preferred alternative for the continuing operations of LANL." Draft LANL SWEIS, page S-13.

As policy background, the draft LANL SWEIS pays lip service to the 1970 NonProliferation Treaty (NPT):

“In Article VI of the NPT, treaty parties “undertake to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament...” The U.S. takes this commitment seriously and has emphasized dedication to both the long-term goal of eliminating nuclear weapons and the requirement that the U.S. has modern, flexible, and resilient nuclear capabilities that are safe and secure, until such a time as nuclear weapons can prudently be eliminated from the world.” P. 1-7.

Left unsaid is that no nuclear power, including the United States, has ever even tried to enter into good faith negotiations toward nuclear weapons disarmament, pledged to more than a half-century ago. Instead, all nuclear weapons states are now engaged in massive “modernization” programs to keep nuclear weapons forever, leading to today’s accelerating nuclear weapons arms race. Also, very much left unsaid is the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, ratified by 73 countries, nearing its fourth anniversary since it went into effect.

In a rigged game, the draft LANL SWEIS gives citizens false choices between three scripted scenarios: expanded nuclear weapons programs (contradictorily called the “No Action Alternative”); yet more expanded nuclear weapons programs (the so-called “Modernized Operations Alternative”); and yet far more expanded nuclear weapons programs. The latter, NNSA’s preferred “Expanded Operations Alternative,” incorporates all of the projects and programs of the previous two “alternatives” but adds still more.

As a baseline, all three alternatives primarily revolve around expanded production of plutonium “pit” bomb cores, the critical component of thermonuclear weapons. NNSA is pursuing a

redundant two-site pit production strategy at LANL and the Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina. However, pit production at SRS has more than doubled in estimated costs and is delayed by a minimum of six years. This could quadruple production to 80 pits per year or more at LANL, which has a long track record of nuclear safety incidences.

NNSA argues increased pit production at LANL is a “No Action Alternative” because it was self-approved in previous analyses under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). However, those analyses were done without public hearings in lesser “Supplement Analyses” to an outdated 2008 nation-wide programmatic environmental impact statement and the 2008 LANL site-wide EIS. Nuclear Watch vigorously protested both Supplement Analyses. In related litigation in which we were co-plaintiffs, a federal judge ruled in September 2024 that NNSA had violated NEPA by not completing a new nation-wide programmatic environmental impact statement on simultaneous pit production at two sites.

LANL’s budget for nuclear weapons programs has already more than doubled in the last decade. Contrary to PR spin that the Lab is growing increasingly diversified, the budget percentage devoted to nuclear weapons has steadily grown to 79% of LANL’s \$5 billion annual budget. In addition, nearly all of the Lab’s remaining programs either directly or indirectly support those nuclear weapons programs.

The rigged choices that NNSA’s Draft LANL SWEIS pushes on New Mexicans will accelerate that trend, which our congressional delegation justifies as jobs, jobs, jobs. However, U.S. Census Bureau data show that New Mexico’s per capita income has declined from 32nd in 1959 to 46th in 2022. At the same time, we remain dead last in quality of public education and the well-being of our children. Further, LANL still can’t determine the extent of deep groundwater contamination it has caused. Moreover, the Lab plans to “cap and cover” some 800,000 cubic yards of radioactive and toxic wastes, leaving them permanently buried in unlined pits and trenches as a perpetual threat to irreplaceable water sources.

Expanded plutonium pit production has largely fueled LANL’s ever-climbing budget, cementing it as more and more a nuclear weapons production site. But ironically future pit production is not to maintain the safety and reliability of the existing stockpile, but instead is for speculative, untested new-design nuclear weapons. They cannot be full-scale tested because of the existing global testing moratorium, thereby perhaps lowering confidence in stockpile reliability. Or these new-design nuclear weapons could prompt the U.S. to resume testing, which would have severe international proliferation consequences. Ironically, in 2006 independent experts concluded that pits have servable lifetimes of at least 100 years (their average age is now ~42) and more than 15,000 existing pits are stored at NNSA’s Pantex Plant near Amarillo, TX.

In all, while incorporating the “No Action” and “Modernization” Alternatives, the Expanded Operations Alternative:

- Will increase plutonium pit production to at least 30 pits per year while building in surge capacity for at least 80 pits per year in the likely event that the Savannah River Site is further delayed.
- Proposes up to 5.8 million square feet in new construction while calling for 2,800,000 square feet in decontamination and demolition of old facilities, for a net gain of 3 million square feet in

new facilities, mostly for nuclear weapons programs. Pages S-10 to S-12. Related astronomical costs are not given, which NNSA almost invariably exceeds. (Separate budget documents show that upgrades to LANL's plutonium pit production facilities will cost at least \$8 billion over the next five years.)

Jay Coghlan, Director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, commented: "The United States already has a reliable, extensively tested nuclear weapons stockpile that can end human civilization many times over. These exorbitant sums for the production of new-design nuclear weapons will just push us deeper into the new, increasingly dangerous nuclear arms race. This robs taxpayers' money from addressing today's acute threats, such as catastrophic wildfires and potential global pandemics."

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Selected other issues in the Draft LANL SWEIS:

- LANL plans to build and operate a BioSafety Level-3 facility that would handle pathogens such as anthrax (a similar BSL-3 facility at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory conducts dangerous aerosolized experiments with anthrax). Page 3-47. LANL dropped a proposal for a BSL-3 in 2004 after Nuclear Watch New Mexico sued the Department of Energy under the National Environmental Policy Act for inadequate analysis. The appropriateness of a secret nuclear weapons lab working with bioweapons agents is questionable, especially when other federal public health agencies could handle that mission.
- LANL continues to plan for the controversial release of up to 100,000 curies of gaseous tritium (a radioactive isotope of hydrogen). P. 3-13. More than 10% of gaseous tritium is assumed to condense as tritiated water vapor which can bioaccumulate, even crossing the placenta.
- Another controversial issue is a proposed new electrical transmission line that would cross the environmentally and culturally sensitive Caja del Rio, for which the U.S. Forest Service has conducted an environmental assessment. The draft LANL SWEIS proposes the "installation of up to 159 megawatts of solar photovoltaic arrays across the site." See <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2025-01-10/pdf/2025-00265.pdf> and page 3-30. This could eliminate the need for the new transmission line, which the Forest Service should seriously consider as important new information before granting right-of-way.

The Draft LANL SWEIS is available at <https://www.energy.gov/nepa/articles/doeeis-0552-draft-environmental-impact-statement>

The deadline for public comments to NNSA on its draft LANL SWEIS is March 11, 2025. Public hearings are scheduled as follows:

- February 11, 2025, at the Santa Fe Community Convention Center, Sweeney Room, 1-4 p.m. and 5-9 p.m. There will be a yet to be specified virtual option for these two meetings.
- February 12, 2025, in Española at Mision y Convento, 5-8 p.m. This meeting is in-person only.
- February 13, 2025, in Los Alamos at Fuller Lodge, Pajarito Room, 5-8 p.m. This meeting is in-person only.

This press release is available online at <https://nukewatch.org/lanl-sweis-rigged-alternatives-pr>