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The Future of Los Alamos Lab: More Nuclear Weapons or Cleanup?

The Department of Energy “Defers” Comprehensive Cleanup Until Plutonium Pit Production Is Done

Santa Fe, NM – Nuclear Watch New Mexico has released its new fact sheet *The Future of Los Alamos Lab: More Nuclear Weapons or Cleanup?* It documents the following:

In September 2023 the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) issued a groundbreaking draft Order to excavate and comprehensively clean up an estimated 198,000 cubic meters of radioactive and toxic wastes at the Los Alamos National Laboratory’s (LANL’s) “Area C” waste dump. The Lab and the Department of Energy (DOE) are adamantly against comprehensive cleanup. In this particular case, their unyielding opposition is amplified by fear of how Area C cleanup could impact LANL’s primary mission of plutonium “pit” bomb core production for new-design nuclear weapons. Instead, they want to “cap and cover” the wastes, leaving them permanently buried in unlined pit and trenches as a perpetual threat to groundwater.

Area C last received radioactive and toxic wastes in 1974. But in a legal maneuver to evade real cleanup, in June 2025 DOE unilaterally declared that the old waste dump:

“is associated with active Facility operations and will be Deferred from further corrective action under [NMED’s] Consent Order until it is no longer associated with active Facility operations.”

Area C is within a few hundred yards of LANL’s plutonium pit production facility. DOE’s unilateral deferral of Area C until it “is no longer associated with active Facility operations” in effect means that it will never be cleaned up. DOE plans to produce new plutonium pit bomb cores for new design nuclear weapons until at least 2050.

A public hearing on NMED’s draft Order to comprehensively clean up Area C was originally scheduled for around March 2026. That date is now uncertain due to DOE’s legal maneuvering.

Jay Coghlan, Director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, commented: “The Lab’s budget for new nuclear weapons production has doubled over the last decade while cleanup has been cut. We strongly support NMED’s effort to hold the Lab accountable to the people of New Mexico and make it genuinely clean up. We must protect our most valuable asset for future generations, which is clean, uncontaminated groundwater.”

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For more, please see Nuclear Watch New Mexico’s fact sheet on Area C, [The Future of Los Alamos Lab: More Nuclear Weapons or Cleanup?](#) at <https://nukewatch.org/area-c-fact-sheet/>

This [press release](#) is online at <https://nukewatch.org/the-future-of-los-alamos-lab-more-nuclear-weapons-or-cleanup/>