



Nuclear Watchdog Sues for Plutonium Pit Production “Special Study”

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Santa Fe, NM – Nuclear Watch New Mexico has sued the Department of Energy under the Freedom of Information Act for its *Special Study of the National Nuclear Security Administration’s Leadership and Management of the Plutonium Pit Production Mission*. The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) is the semi-autonomous nuclear weapons agency within DOE.

Plutonium “pits” are the radioactive cores or “triggers” of nuclear weapons. Their expanded manufacturing has been the chokepoint of resumed industrial-scale nuclear weapons production by the U.S. Crucially, no future pit production is to maintain the safety and reliability of the existing stockpile. Instead, it is all for new-design nuclear weapons for the new arms race. These new weapons can’t be tested because of the existing global testing moratorium, thereby perhaps degrading confidence in the stockpile. Or new-design nuclear weapons testing could prompt the U.S. to resume testing, which would have severe international proliferation consequences.

Plutonium pit production is the NNSA’s most expensive and complex program to date. However, the independent Government Accountability Office (GAO) has repeatedly stated that the agency has no credible costs estimates and no “Integrated Master Schedule” for simultaneous production at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) in northern New Mexico and the Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina. In fact, DOE and NNSA have been on the GAO’s “High Risk List” for project mismanagement and waste of taxpayers’ dollars since 1991. At more than \$30 billion, the plutonium pit plant at SRS is on track to become the most expensive building in U.S. history. A comparable amount will be spent at LANL on facility upgrades and related projects, for which the NNSA fails to keep total aggregated costs.

Even the Department of Energy recognizes how deeply troubled NNSA’s plutonium pit production program is. In August 2025 DOE Deputy Secretary James Danly ordered the “Special Study” completed within 120 days (i.e., mid-December 2025). On December 16, 2025, Sen. Elizabeth Warren and Rep. John Garamendi, both members of the Armed Services Committees, unsuccessfully demanded the Special Study.

Nuclear Watch New Mexico filed a Freedom of Information Act request for the Special Study on December 22, 2025. Having received no substantive response, in April 2026 we requested expedited processing because of an open public comment period for a Pit Production Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (that we had to sue NNSA for to begin with). Having received no further response from DOE we have therefore filed this litigation in the Washington, DC federal court.

Nuclear Watch New Mexico's counsel is Jules Zacher, who has successfully represented us in two previous FOIA lawsuits. Apart from his legal practice, Mr. Zacher is also chairman of the Board of Directors of the Council for a Livable World, founder of Citizens for Transparency and on the Executive Board of the Center for Ethics and Rule of Law at the University of Pennsylvania. He commented, "This Special Study has not been classified to my knowledge and was completed before the end of 2025. The American taxpayer deserves to see it. It's an exorbitant amount of money he and she is being asked to bear for a deeply troubled and provocative program."

Jay Coghlan, Director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, added, "There is a massive coverup by DOE and NNSA over their plutonium pit production program. To grease expanded nuclear weapons production, they have rescinded nuclear safety regulations, illegally restricted the access of the independent Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, and are withholding crucial documents from the American taxpayer. We hope this lawsuit will help to bring NNSA's plutonium house of cards tumbling down."

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Nuclear Watch New Mexico's complaint is available at <https://nukewatch.org/nuclear-weapons-watchdog-complaint-nnsa-pit-production-special-study>

DOE Deputy Secretary James Danly's August 2025 order for the pit production "Special Study" is available at <https://nukewatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/DOE-Special-Study-NNSA-Leadership-Mgmt-Plutonium-Pit-Production-Mission-Ltr-11Aug2025.pdf>

Sen. Elizabeth Warren's and Rep. John Garamendi's December 2025 request to DOE for the Special Study is available at https://www.warren.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/media/doc/letter_to_doe_nnsa_re_pit_production_mismanagement.pdf

This press release is available online at <https://nukewatch.org/nuclear-weapons-watchdog-sues-for-pit-production-special-study/>

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