

The Only Safe Nuke Power? No Nuke Power

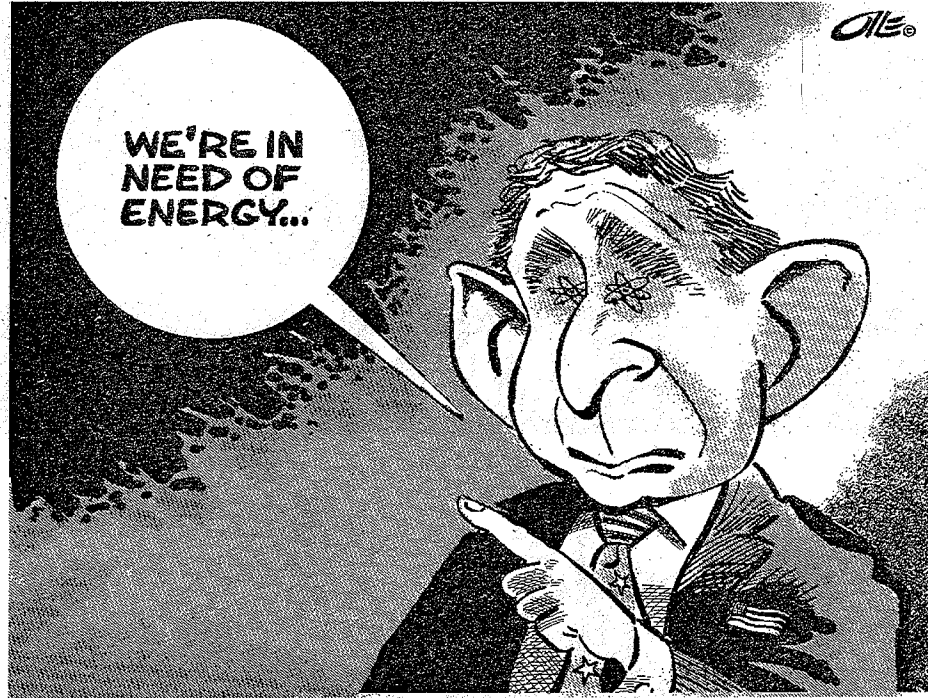
BY PETER NEILS
Los Alamos Study Group

With increasing acknowledgment of climate change, and the foreseeable decline in oil and natural gas production, proponents of nuclear power see an opportunity to resuscitate the comatose US nuclear power industry.

Led by Senator Domenici's successful effort to have nuclear mis-defined as a renewable energy source in the recently passed energy bill, the nuclearists can smell opportunity in the air. Several so-called environmental organizations have been duped into singing in the "Nukes are the answer" chorus.

Yet, simply calling it renewable does not make it so. Uranium is the primary fuel of nuclear power plants and there is a finite amount of uranium ore. Calling it renewable is disingenuous at best. Breeder reactors are energy intensive to operate, prohibitively costly to build, and the solutions to their operational problems remain elusive. There exists no reliable commercial breeder reactor.

Also problematic is the fact that if global nuclear capacity were to double by 2050, it would reduce greenhouse emissions by about 5%, less than one tenth of the reductions required to stabilize atmospheric concentrations of green-



house gases.

A tenfold increase in capacity would reduce greenhouse releases from power generation by 50%. That would exhaust reserves of high grade uranium in just 5 years, and all known reserves in 20, rendering the massive investment (up to \$4 billion per plant) such construction would require absurd.

And, of course, the nuclear

industry's dirty secret is that nuclear power is not actually emissions-free. When the environmental costs of the fuel chain are factored in, the operation of a nuclear plant actually produces approximately one third of the greenhouse gases of a modern natural-gas power stations.

There is an ongoing effort by the nuclearists to link nuclear power to a future hydrogen

economy. The question it begs is: If the hydrogen economy is dependent on nuclear power, why, given the problems discussed in this essay, would we regard hydrogen as a sustainable, economically practical component of our energy plan?

Energy efficiency improvements are seven times more effective per dollar spent at reducing greenhouse gases than nuclear power.

Nuclear power is already the most heavily government subsidized power source in our history. The existence of a federally subsidized insurance plan gives the lie to any pretenses of safety. If the nuclear power industry is so safe, why can they not find a private entity to insure their power plants? Instead, their liability is limited by Congress through the Price-Anderson Act to scarcely 2% of the potential costs of a major accident at a nuclear power plant, with the remainder borne by US taxpayers.

The government is already on the hook for both the development of much of the industry and its insurance, as well as the disposal of its waste. How are citizens supposed to make informed choices about how to proceed into a precarious energy future without accurate analysis of the real costs of our options?

If nuclear power is really a viable enterprise, and now it enjoys a monumental 50-year public investment, isn't it time we expected the industry to stand on its own in the energy market?

Proponents brush off the waste issue as if it will be resolved along with our indecision about nuclear power. Responsible stewardship takes a less Pollyanna approach to this problem, which does not go away just because one ignores

it.

It will be expensive in both the long and short term, and there is simply no way to assure the maintenance of institutional controls for 10,000 years. There is no way to assure the waste will not become a danger to human health in the future. The National Academy of Science reached this same conclusion in their analysis of DOE's Long Term Stewardship program for nuclear waste. ...

Every nuclear power plant is a weapon of mass destruction waiting to be triggered by a terrorist, a hostile nation or even a disgruntled employee. An attack by a plane, bomb or conventionally armed missile would be sufficient to cause a massive nuclear release. Further, the proliferation of nuclear materials associated with a buildup of nuclear power plants complicates attempts to keep those materials out of the hands of terrorists as well as rogue nations.

Finally, based on the industries safety record, statistically a ten-fold increase would mean an accident causing reactor core damage with the potential for a release on the scale of Chernobyl every three years.

I recall a glib comment by a nuclear industry insider that might have been more revealing than intended: The paper-moderated, ink-cooled reactor is the safest of all.

Lab Seals Faulty Container

Plutonium Was Stored in Plastic

BY JOHN ARNOLD
Journal Staff Writer

7/25/06

Workers at Los Alamos National Laboratory have sealed a faulty storage container responsible for an accidental plutonium release last month. But dozens of similarly constructed containers remain in the plutonium facility's vault, according to a representative from an independent safety board.

Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board site representative C.H. Keilers Jr. wrote in a Jan. 6 memorandum that the source of the contamination appears to be a container of plutonium oxide stored at LANL's Technical Area-55.

The highly carcinogenic nuclear material — which dates back to the early 1980s — was packaged in a plastic jar enclosed in a plastic bag, Keilers wrote. Like dozens of similar containers in the vault, the jar and bag sat in a taped, slip-lid can.

"... the inner jar and bag failed, releasing powder into

the can; the vinyl tape around the lid circumference then possibly failed, causing the release," the memo states.

Nine workers evacuated the vault after air monitors detected the Dec. 19 release, which a LANL spokesman described as "a minor event." Nasal swipes indicated five workers had been exposed to minute contamination levels that registered far below federal exposure limits.

The release came as LANL works to comply with 1994 and 2000 Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board recommendations to stabilize and safely store nuclear materials at Department of Energy facilities across the country.

The United States stopped manufacturing new nuclear weapons in 1989, and the board stated in its 1994 recommendation that materials left over from weapons production posed hazards if they weren't stabilized and stored properly.

For example, plutonium can interact with and rupture plastic in older storage containers.

In 2000, the board reiterated its concerns, suggesting in a revised recommendation that DOE facilities weren't making

adequate progress in implementing stabilization and storage programs.

LANL Nuclear Materials Technology division leader Steve Yarbrow said Tuesday that under the revised 2000 recommendation, LANL is ahead of its schedule — possibly by one or two years — to stabilize and repack nuclear material by 2010. LANL workers have "triple-bagged" last month's faulty container and a similar one, which had been scheduled to be repackaged this month.

"We have a full recovery plan that we're executing," he said. "We meet with (DNFSB representatives) daily on our status and where we're at, and we're moving ahead in a very diligent, methodical fashion."

But lab watchdogs have criticized progress on implementing the board's recommendations, saying LANL has dragged its feet on the issue for more than a decade.

"It was to avoid this kind of accident that the recommendation was made," said Los Alamos Study Group executive director Greg Mello. "The longer plutonium is in contact with plastic, the worse the problem becomes."

Safety representative: lab has containers similar to failed one.

The America's Intelligence Wire (Jan 25, 2006): pNA.

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(From AP Worldstream)

Byline: ELLEN SIMON

A federal safety board representative says Los Alamos National Laboratory has dozens of containers similar to one blamed for a plutonium release last month.

C.H. Keilers Jr. of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board wrote in a memo Jan. 6 that the contamination appeared to be from a container of plutonium oxide stored in a vault at the lab's technical area 55.

His memo said the material, dating to the early 1980s, was inside a plastic storage jar enclosed in a plastic bag. That in turn was inside a taped, slip-lid can.

The inner jar and bag failed, releasing plutonium oxide powder into the can, he wrote.

"The vinyl tape around the lid circumference then possibly failed, causing the release," his memo said.

Los Alamos workers subsequently triple-bagged the container involved in last month's incident and a similar container.

Five lab workers were exposed to plutonium _ a radioactive element used primarily in nuclear weapons _ during the release.

A lab spokesman described the incident as minor, while a government watchdog group called it "serious plutonium contamination."

Nine workers were in the plutonium-handling facility, and five were exposed, the lab said. However, the lab said none of the workers required medical attention and that the exposure was so low _ below federal exposure limits _ that legally, the lab did not have to report it to the U.S. Department of Energy.

The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board made recommendations in 1994 and 2000 to stabilize and safely store nuclear material at DOE facilities across the country.

The board is an independent federal agency created by Congress in 1988 to oversee safety in the DOE's nuclear weapons complex.

Under the board's revised 2000 recommendations, Los Alamos is ahead of schedule in stabilizing and repackaging nuclear materials by 2010, said Steve Yarbrow, leader of Los Alamos' nuclear materials technology division.

"We have a full recovery plan that we're executing," Yarbrow said.

However, a watchdog group has criticized Los Alamos' progress in implementing the board's recommendations.

"It was to avoid this kind of accident that the recommendation was made," said Greg Mello, director of the Los Alamos Study Group. "The longer plutonium is in contact with plastic, the worse the problem becomes."

Source Citation: "Safety representative: lab has containers similar to failed one." *The America's Intelligence Wire* (Jan 25, 2006): NA. *General Reference Center Gold*. Thomson Gale. New Mexico State Library. 14 Nov. 2006
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CAB takes lead on public concerns

ROGER SNODGRASS
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Monitor Assistant Editor

1/26/06

The Northern New Mexican Citizens Advisory Board is becoming the go-to place for environmental issues at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

"You guys have done an amazing amount of work in 2005," said Los Alamos Site Office Manager Ed Wilmott in a presentation to the board Wednesday afternoon, "and the technical quality rivals the lab."

The CAB, as it is known, is one of several Site-Specific Advisory Boards around the country, chartered by the Department of Energy to provide independent advice and recommendations on environmental restoration and waste management issues related to a particular area of concern.

Under the chairmanship of Taos environmental engineer J.D. Campbell, the local board has continued and expanded its role as a conduit for public involvement in the northern New Mexico

area, adopting and formalizing complex issues, anticipating snags and weaknesses in the system, and identifying key questions for public discussion and education.

Wednesday's meeting included Wilmott's report from DOE, a timely update on the regulatory situation by James Bearzi, the hazardous waste chief at the New Mexico Environment Department and a presentation on a number of groundwater topics at the laboratory.

Last year, the CAB, under former chair Tim DeLong, took up the difficult problem of Area G, the laboratory's low-level waste depository, holding a well-attended information summit on the issue in Santa Fe.

That meeting in May was followed up with detailed reviews, recommendations and presentations and was the subject of several issues addressed by Wilmott Wednesday.

None of the board's 10 rec-

See **CAB**, 6

CAB Advisory Board takes lead

From Page 1

ommendations last year have been formally answered by DOE, although Wilmott said some of them had been thought about and were the subject of actions taken by the laboratory.

He said the suspension of operations at the laboratory, the contract competition and now the preparations for changing over to the new contract have absorbed much of his time. He addressed a number of the outstanding questions and promised to be more personally involved in the future.

Bernie Pleau, a spokesperson for the local DOE office, said the board was highly regarded. "We really think this is a very value-added board," he said. "They work tremendously well within the charter and they have some tremendously well qualified people."

In September, the CAB formally recommended that Area G not be expanded, according to current plans that call for a new 30-acre extension of the site into Zone 4, even while the process of closing down the current 60-acres of deposits in Area G continues under a consent order with the state.

"We are undoubtedly going to have to expand the storage of waste in Area G," Wilmott said.

He said he agreed with the recommendation personally and that his emotional response is favorable, "But I can't do it in isolation from the rest of the complex."

He offered instead to look for every way to minimize the volume and encourage environmental awareness at the laboratory.

Nuclear watchdog groups like the Los Alamos Study Group have campaigned for many years to end the practice of burying nuclear and chemical waste in shallow pits on a laboratory mesa-top.

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LASG Executive Director Mello used the public comment period to press the case for closure once again, asking why DOE has not followed its own requirements for a lifecycle cost analysis of disposing waste at Area G compared to alternatives. He also suggested that the CAB follow very carefully the new groundwater monitoring issues.

Recent problems with the monitoring programs and the possibilities of fast pathways for contaminants to reach the aquifer raise the potential damages from continued burials of low-level and hazardous wastes.

"You can't predict any specific outcome from point A to point B," for groundwater seeping into the complex geology of the mountain, he said. "DOE has spent more than \$1 billion on cleanup so far. It has always proceeded on good intentions and poor management."

Historically CABs have failed and have been shut down for becoming too assertive. Others have lost participation through inactivity or a perceived collusion with their DOE sponsors.

Asked how he maintains the balance, Campbell said today that he has spent much of his 35-year career in environmental remediation activities.

"I've been fortunate to work with leading companies that had the resources and had their public image at the forefront of their concerns," he said. "I've found it important to work with the regulatory community and to give the public confidence in what the solutions are that are being proposed, so then it becomes truly a win-win situation."

Aware of a newly emerging public issue, Campbell has proposed another major conference in the spring on groundwater contamination issues at the laboratory.

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LANL May Begin Building Nuke Pits

Fleet grounded?

Bush's proposed
2007 budget retires
F-117A stealth jets **D1**



'Heavy lift'

President's \$277 trillion budget could be headache
for Congress **A5**

Energy Secretary Says Project a Top Priority

By JOHN FLECK AND MICHAEL COLEMAN
Journal Staff Writers

WASHINGTON — Federal officials on Monday proposed expanding nuclear weapons manufacturing at Los Alamos National Laboratory, part of a sweeping plan to develop new

nuclear weapons for the first time since the end of the Cold War.

By 2012, they hope to be able to make 30 to 40 new plutonium nuclear weapon cores per year, according to the Bush administration's fiscal year 2007 budget request.

The government's top nuclear weapons official cautioned that the new program remains primarily a research effort for now, aimed at finding ways to build safer and more reliable

nuclear weapons. But the spending plan delivered to Congress on Monday includes, for the first time, a long-term spending plan for moving the weapons from the drawing board to production.

In a news conference unveiling the administration's proposed spending plan, Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman said the new "Reliable Replacement Warhead" project, as the effort

See LANL on PAGE A2

LANL May Begin Building Nuke Pits

from PAGE A1

is called, was a Bush administration priority.

The Energy Department budget also includes money for a new civilian science initiative promised last week in President Bush's State of the Union speech.

Overall, funding for New Mexico's Energy Department laboratories — Los Alamos and Sandia — is projected to decline 2 percent next year, according to the U.S. Department of Energy's proposed 2007 budget.

That is unlikely to cause any job losses at the labs, Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., said in a telephone news conference.

The biggest news in the budget was not the dollars but how the Department of Energy wants to spend them: to design replacements for aging Cold

War nuclear weapons.

The budget request and recent comments by senior officials lay out a longer-term plan that suggests the country could be building new nuclear weapons by 2012. They would be the first since the Cold War ended in 1991.

Under the plan, which must be approved by Congress, Los Alamos will be asked to make plutonium "pits" for the new weapons.

Pits sit in the heart of modern nuclear weapons. They are semi-spherical shells of plutonium that are squeezed by high explosives to start the weapon's chain reaction.

The United States has been unable to make pits since the Rocky Flats plutonium factory near Denver closed in 1989. Los Alamos is preparing to begin making 10 pits per year by 2008

as replacements for pits in existing weapons. The budget unveiled Monday contemplates expanding that to between 30 and 40 pits per year by 2012 for the new weapon.

In a talk two weeks ago, National Nuclear Security Administration chief Linton Brooks called the shift to manufacturing new weapons rather than simply maintaining old ones "transformational."

Greg Mello, an anti-weapons activist with the Albuquerque-based Los Alamos Study Group, called the budget proposal "a radical change."

"The emphasis is shifting from maintaining existing weapons to replacing all of them," Mello said Monday.

In Monday's news conference, Brooks cautioned that the Reliable Replacement Warhead remains a research effort.

"Remember, this is research," he said, "so we don't know whether we can do all the things we hoped we can do." But he added that the plan "has a great deal of possibility for improving the long-term safety, security and reliability of the stockpile."

For the Bush administration's new science initiative, Bodman said the DOE budget contains an extra half-billion dollars for scientific research and development, in accordance with President Bush's call for keeping American technologically competitive in the years ahead.

"This will be a clarion call to the world that America means to retain our position of leadership in research and development and benefit from the economic fallout that we have enjoyed for the past five or six decades," Bodman said.

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Commentary

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Commentary: Wrong investment

President Bush, supported by N.M.'s senators, pours money into dangerous and costly nuclear power and calls it an alternative energy source.

Peter Neils

Tuesday, February 7, 2006

In his State of the Union address, President Bush continued to frame foreign policy as a struggle between evil and virtue - which in his lexicon is "freedom" and "democracy."

In spite of near universal accord to the contrary in the international community, the president insists we are "winning" his adventure in Iraq.

**TODAY'S
BYLINE**

Likewise, his trumpeted plans on renewable energy, even while knowing he had just slashed \$28 million from the budget of the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in neighboring Colorado.

Neils is an Albuquerque resident and a board member of the Los Alamos Study Group, which monitors nuclear weapons programs in New Mexico.

Worse, contrary to the president's rhetoric, researchers there have been told that the job cuts would be concentrated among researchers in wind and biomass, which includes ethanol - technologies cited by Bush as solutions.

In his recently passed national energy act, he jumbled nuclear power with true renewable energy sources. It is difficult to ascertain - particularly in this most secretive of administrations - just where the billions of dollars for "renewable energy research" on his watch has actually gone. A new contrived definition provides cover for his less than credible claims.

In Republican New Mexico Sen. Pete Domenici's curious view, nuclear power - an inherently dangerous enterprise that produces extremely dangerous wastes - is safe because we have not had a serious accident. Yet. This is a little like saying cars are safe because one has not personally been in an accident.

In fact, every nuclear power plant is a pre-deployed weapon, and the points of vulnerability are all too easy to enumerate.

The nuclear power industry enjoys a monumental 50-year public investment of perhaps hundreds of billions of dollars. Yet, only through another round of massive tax incentives, coupled with licensing and regulatory relief, is it being coaxed back to life under the watchful stewardship of New Mexico Sens. Pete Domenici of Albuquerque and Jeff Bingaman of Silver City.

Both are recipients of large contributions from parties with interests in nuclear power. They may also appreciate that the inevitable continued research into more advanced nuclear power means more money for their home team, the nuclear labs in New Mexico.

Tellingly, nuclear power plants figure prominently into the hydrogen economy touted by Bush, as they do in Gov. Bill Richardson's renewable power distribution proposal before the state Legislature.

Yet, why choose to revive this dangerous enterprise when we still cannot dispose of the waste from existing nuclear plants? The American public is also financing this, and the problematic Yucca Mountain dump at the Nevada (nuclear) Test Site will hold only the waste generated by nuclear facilities through 2015. Its capacity will be fully committed when it finally opens, if it does.

Proponents claim nuclear power emits zero carbon dioxide, thus reducing greenhouse gas emissions. But this ignores other phases of the nuclear fuel cycle, which by some estimates produces one-third of the emissions of a modern natural gas power station of comparable size.

Damages from a major accident at a nuclear power plant could top \$540 billion. American taxpayers insure nuclear power plants, limiting their liability to just \$88 million per accident per plant in addition to the \$200 million of insurance they can purchase commercially. Coverage of an accident is capped at \$9.43 billion.

Presumably American taxpayers would pick up the remaining \$530 billion. But what is that to a president, who will not acknowledge that he is shifting much of the expense of his Iraq incursion to future generations rather than pay for it now and have the electorate grasp the financial consequences of his "credit card leadership."

If nuclear power were a safe, cost-effective enterprise, the nuclear power industry would not have needed huge subsidies and public indemnification as incentives to build the plants we have. They'd be lining up to build these speculative new projects on their own dime.

Our approach to nuclear power socializes both the investment and risk while privatizing the profits, an arrangement into which no businessman would enter. But the federal taxpayer has.

If the countless billions that have been squandered on nuclear power had been invested in research in genuine renewable energy technologies, we probably would be energy independent by now.

Instead of contemplating licensing nuclear power plants to the developing world - with its limited infrastructure and all the related risks including nuclear weapon proliferation, accidents and disposal of toxic waste - we could export clean, decentralized renewable power technology.

What a wonderful legacy for our scientists and engineers to have on their conscience when they retire.



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Pit program shows progress: Boost in funds for nuclear warhead apparatus draws cheers and jeers.

Santa Fe New Mexican (Santa Fe, NM) (Feb 8, 2006): pNA.

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Byline: Andy Lenderman

Feb. 8--LOS ALAMOS -- The goal to build 30 to 40 new plutonium pits, or triggers for nuclear warheads, sends a message that the United States has finally caught up with other world nuclear powers, the boss of the National Nuclear Security Administration said Tuesday.

The pit-manufacturing program is based at Los Alamos National Laboratory, the only place in the country where that work occurs, agency chief Linton Brooks said in an interview.

President Bush's proposed 2007 fiscal-year budget includes more than \$147 million for the program, which is an increase, and calls for an eventual boosting of production capacity from 10 pits a year to 30 to 40. Six pits were produced in 2005, according to the president's budget request.

"We're the only nuclear power that can't produce 30 to 40 new pits a year now," Brooks said. "It says through great effort we've taken 30 years to reach the standard China has today."

Brooks was in Los Alamos on Tuesday to visit with agency employees, including the lab director, and attend an awards ceremony for top scientists.

Later, his comments drew criticism from two nuclear-disarmament groups opposed to the pit-production program. Both Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group and Jay Coghlan of Nuclear Watch New Mexico said Brooks' position was "ludicrous," arguing the United States already dominates the world in terms of nuclear military power.

"The U.S. now spends more each year on its military than the whole rest of the world combined," Mello said in a statement. "The U.S. spends more on its nuclear weapons than any other country, and as a result has far more capable nuclear forces than any other."

Brooks also discussed the Reliable Replacement Warhead program, which has been described as a way to refurbish a nuclear weapon based upon basic weapon science that's been proven for decades. Critics say it's a new weapons program that will anger other countries.

Today, Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore national laboratories are in competition to design the replacement warhead.

Brooks said it would have the same military characteristics, the same target and the same delivery system, or missile, to carry it.

"It's component replacement, and the question of how many components do you replace before you say it's new is a little bit of a philosophic question," Brooks said. " ... There's no reasonable definition of a new weapon that would call this a new weapon. It's going to have a lot of new parts on it."

But Coghlan says it is a new weapon.

"With RRW, Brooks is pushing a 'nukes forever' program that will be a Trojan horse for new designs," Coghlan said by e-mail. "He himself has told Congress that U.S. nuclear weapons may no longer be useful because new and more usable lowyield and earth-penetrating weapons are needed."

Brooks, while discussing pit production, explained where he's coming from. "I start from a prejudice," he said. "I believe that we are very unlikely in my lifetime to see the political conditions that will lead to the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. ... We are operating on the view that we are going to maintain the deterrent forever, and I think that's what all of the acknowledged and unacknowledged nuclear powers are doing too."

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Saturday, February 11, 2006

County Is Concerned Over LANL Nuke Waste

By John Arnold

Journal Staff Writer

Another local government is expressing concern over Los Alamos National Laboratory's plans to expand its nuclear waste dump, known as Area G. And this one's close to home for the lab.

Los Alamos County Administrator Max Baker recently sent a letter to the National Nuclear Security Administration's Los Alamos site office questioning the expansion plans, which will add about 30 acres of disposal space in Area G.

"As you know, Los Alamos County has been and continues to be impacted by the disposal of waste generated by LANL operations and undoubtedly the waste buried now will someday need to be removed so longer term costs need to be considered," Baker wrote to site office manager Ed Wilmot in a letter dated Feb. 1. "Also the County has a limited area of space, and an increase in size of the waste disposal area greatly concerns our residents."

The letter goes on to request information regarding the need for expansion. NNSA officials could not be reached for comment Friday afternoon.

In an interview Friday, Baker said he decided to write the letter after reading recent news accounts about expansion plans. Baker noted that LANL is working to clean up other waste sites around the county, including a landfill near the community's airport and the site of a former plutonium facility, TA-21.

"Those other waste sites, it was 50 or 60 years ago they were created," Baker said. "By this project at Area G, are we creating a problem that has to be solved in 50 or 60 years?"

Last year, the Santa Fe City Council passed a nuclear disarmament resolution calling on the federal government to halt nuclear waste disposal in New Mexico, and the Taos Town Council passed a resolution in December discouraging Area G expansion. But this is the first time Los Alamos County has voiced concern, Los Alamos County Councilor Frances Berting said. While the council has not taken up the Area G issue, Berting said members received copies of Baker's letter.

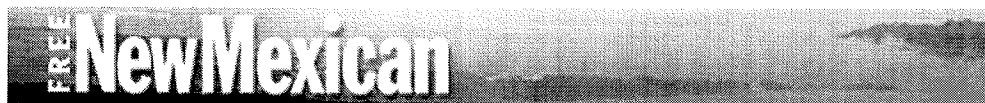
"So we are aware it is basically our policy," Berting said by phone Friday. "And so I don't think anybody has problems with (the letter). I haven't heard anything from the council."

Berting is a member of the Northern New Mexico Citizens' Advisory Board, a federally funded oversight group that also opposes expansion. Wilmot addressed the board last month, saying that while he personally doesn't like the idea of expansion, there's no way it can be avoided. Workers underestimated the amount of waste from ongoing environmental restoration, Wilmot said. And technical issues and cost made other disposal options— like shipping to out-of-state commercial sites— impractical, he added.

Waste is buried in nearly 40 permanent pits in Area G, which has been in continuous operation since 1957. LANL hopes to have a new pit ready to receive low-level radioactive waste this fall.

Baker's letter is the second time in recent months that the county has challenged the NNSA, the arm of the U.S. Department of Energy that funds and oversees LANL operations.

In December, the county sued NNSA to stop construction of new security checkpoints near the lab. Business and town leaders fear the checkpoints— located on town roadways— will hurt the community's economy. The lawsuit is pending.



Group rallies for nuclear disarmament in U.S.

[print](#)

By Andy Lenderman The New Mexican
March 7, 2006

An Albuquerque nuclear-disarmament group argues the country should dismantle its nuclear-weapons arsenal and spend the money on health care, education and other domestic needs.

The Los Alamos Study Group, founded in 1992, rallied in the Capitol Rotunda on Monday morning to celebrate adding the 100th organization to its membership list. Roughly 15 people attended. Director Greg Mello used the occasion to argue against nuclear weapons, nuclear power and New Mexico's involvement in those projects. The country today spends about \$7,600 per household on the military, he said. "We cannot expect to solve any of our society's problems with a military burden like that," Mello said. Instead, according to the group's "Call for Nuclear Disarmament," money should be spent on "affordable health care for everyone, better education, renewable energy and economic opportunity for those who have none."

The federal Department of Energy, which oversees Los Alamos National Laboratory and Sandia National Laboratories, is expected to spend about \$4.4 billion overall in New Mexico this year, the office of U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., has reported.

With that money comes thousands of jobs. University of New Mexico economist Larry Waldman has said Northern New Mexico would go back to "prehistoric times" without that federal funding. Domenici is an advocate of nuclear power as an answer to the world's energy problems. Mello is not. He argued Monday that the state's per-capita income has declined relative to other states, even as federal money to the state increased. His group advocates stopping the design and manufacture of all nuclear weapons; dismantling the country's nuclear arsenal; and stopping nuclearwaste disposal at Los Alamos.

Examples of member organizations include the Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice, Pax Christi New Mexico and Veterans for Peace, Santa Fe.

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Comments

By **Franco manning** (Submitted: 03/07/2006 6:38 am)

Anti-Nuke Group: Support Growing

SANTA FE — An anti-nuclear group, marking a milestone in an 18-month campaign to enlist support, said Monday its call for nuclear disarmament is growing.

More than 100 nonprofit organizations in New Mexico have signed the Los Alamos Study Group's "Call for Disarmament," Greg Mello, the Albuquerque-based group's executive director, said at a news conference in Santa Fe.

He also said the United States' recent nuclear pact with India and its plans to build replacement warheads for existing nuclear weapons undermine international nonproliferation efforts.

3-7-06 Journal

Tuesday, March 7, 2006

Anti-Nuclear Group Gaining Support

By John Arnold

Journal Staff Writer

The call for nuclear disarmament is growing, an anti-nuclear group said Monday as it marked a milestone in its 18-month campaign to enlist the support of community groups, businesses and individuals.

More than 100 nonprofit organizations in New Mexico have signed the Los Alamos Study Group's "Call for Disarmament," said Greg Mello, the Albuquerque-based group's executive director.

Los Alamos Study Group's campaign coincides with a national debate over whether the United States is abandoning commitments it made under the 1968 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, part of which calls on signees to work toward nuclear disarmament.

At a news conference in Santa Fe on Monday, Mello said the United States' recent nuclear pact with India and its plans to build replacement warheads for existing nuclear weapons undermine international nonproliferation efforts.

"Both of these are body blows to the world's nonproliferation regime," Mello said.

In several recent public appearances, National Nuclear Security Administration chief Linton Brooks has described his agency's plans for the country's nuclear policy, which includes a prominent role for Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Brooks says the United States has made "remarkable progress" in reducing the number of nuclear weapons and will continue to do so. But he says the end of the Cold War did not diminish the importance of nuclear weapons in the face of new kinds of threats.

"The United States will, for the foreseeable future, need to retain both nuclear forces and the capabilities to sustain and modernize those forces," Brooks said during a visit to the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tenn., last week. "I do not see any chance of the political conditions for abolition arising in my lifetime, nor do I think abolition could be verified if it were negotiated."

Under NNSA's plans, Los Alamos National Laboratory would play a key role in a program to replace aging nuclear weapons with more reliable bombs. NNSA wants LANL to manufacture 30 to 40 plutonium bomb cores, known as pits, by 2012 for the Reliable Replacement Warhead program.

The government has not manufactured pits since the Rocky Flats plutonium factory near Denver closed in 1989.

The Los Alamos Study Group's disarmament campaign demands that the government not manufacture any more pits, that the United States fulfill its obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and that nuclear dumps at Los Alamos National Laboratory be closed.

In addition to the list of nonprofit organizations, 286 New Mexico businesses, 80

national and international organizations and 2,500 individuals have endorsed Los Alamos Study Group's "Call for Disarmament," Mello said.

"I guess what it does is give shape to our sense that in the community there's a lot of opposition to nuclear weapons and the agenda of the lab," Mello said of the campaign.

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Thursday, March 16, 2006

Sprinkler Fixes Halt Some LANL Nuke Work

By John Arnold*Journal Staff Writer*

Nuclear-related work at Los Alamos National Laboratory's plutonium facility has come to a month-long halt while maintenance workers replace about half of the facility's fire sprinkler heads.

The fire suppression system was at no time inoperable, according to spokesman Kevin Roark. But about 1,000 of Technical Area 55's 2,000 sprinkler heads were in "questionable" condition when evaluated against National Fire Protection Association standards, he said.

The 150,000 square-foot facility at Technical Area 55— where work with weapons-grade plutonium is performed— has been operating in "mode 2" for about two weeks, according to Roark. Mode 2 means certain kinds of activities are stopped while maintenance work is performed at LANL nuclear facilities.

"Mode 2 in this case means they stopped ... 'spark and flame' activities, which means no metal grinding, no metal cutting, anything that might cause a spark or a flame," Roark said. "And that includes working with nuclear materials."

Lab officials expect Technical Area 55 to be fully operational by the end of the month.

In the meantime, fire watchers have been posted at the facility, and any work considered essential can be granted an exception to proceed, according to Roark.

He said that mode 2 maintenance operations are "fairly routine," and likened the current situation to a ship being dry-docked for repairs.

"This kind of thing happens," he said. "We have maintenance issues, maintenance concerns. We go into mode 2. We take care of them," he said.

But a lab watchdog thinks LANL should have announced the situation publicly when work at Technical Area 55 stopped two weeks ago.

The facility, which employs about 1,000 people, was constructed beginning in 1973. Questionable sprinkler heads raise questions about what other conditions might exist in the aging building, said Los Alamos Study Group executive director Greg Mello.

"The fact that (the sprinkler heads) are being replaced means somebody's doing their job," Mello said. "We just don't know what lies behind this decision to change them out, and it would be nice to have a very clear explanation of that because the hazard involved is huge."

Certain work at Technical Area 55 was also put on standby earlier this year for maintenance related to the fire alarm system.

LANL officials put Technical Area 55 in mode 2 and established a fire watch

in January "due to suspected failure of a 17-year-old fire alarm system component that is no longer made," according to a report by the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, a federal safety oversight agency.

The fire alarm system was repaired and operations resumed less than a week later.

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Posted on Sat, Mar. 18, 2006

Amount of unpaid federal fines up sharply

MARTHA MENDOZA and CHRISTOPHER SULLIVAN
Associated Press

When a gasoline spill and fiery explosion killed three young people in Washington state, officials announced a record penalty against a gas pipeline company: \$3 million to send the message that such tragedies "must never happen again."

When nuclear labs around the country were found exposing workers to radiation and breaking other safety rules, assessments totaling \$2.5 million were quickly ordered.

When coal firms' violations were blamed for deaths, injuries and risks to miners from Alabama to West Virginia, they were slapped with more than \$1.3 million in penalties.

What happened next with these no-nonsense enforcement efforts? Not much. The pipeline tab was eventually reduced by 92 percent, the labs' assessments were waived as soon as they were issued, and the mine penalties largely went unpaid.

The amount of unpaid federal fines has risen sharply in the last decade. Individuals and corporations regularly avoid large, highly publicized penalties for wrongdoing - sometimes through negotiations, sometimes because companies go bankrupt, sometimes due to officials' failure to keep close track of who owes what under a decentralized collection system.

These are conclusions of an Associated Press examination of federal financial penalty enforcement across the nation, which also found:

_The government is currently owed more than \$35 billion in fines and other payments from criminals and in civil cases, according to Justice Department figures. This is almost five times the amount uncollected 10 years ago - and enough to cover the annual budget of the Department of Homeland Security. A decade ago, Congress mandated that fines be imposed regardless of defendants' ability to pay, which has added tremendously to outstanding debt.

_In 2004, federal authorities ordered \$7.8 billion in 98,985 fines, penalties and restitution demands in criminal and civil cases, but collected less than half of that.

_White-collar crime cases account for the largest amount of uncollected debt. In a study, Government Accountability Office investigators found that just 7 percent of restitution in such cases is paid.

"Fines and orders to pay restitution are an important part of how we punish convicted criminals. When so little effort is made to collect that money, we allow convicted criminals to avoid punishment for their crimes, weaken our criminal justice system and ultimately deny justice to the victims of crimes," said Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., who has pressed for closer scrutiny for years.

The mechanisms of financial penalty enforcement are complex. To glimpse them, the AP filed Freedom of Information Act requests with a dozen federal agencies, seeking records on why and how they issue and collect administrative penalties and other assessments.

The AP reviewed the responses, which ranged across the spectrum of regulation - from penalties for an Illinois company's shoddy bike handlebars that resulted in knocked-out teeth to fines for selling tainted meat in Tennessee. The AP also reviewed more than a decade of congressional and Justice Department reports on uncollected debt, and interviewed agency officials, prosecutors and individuals who were fined.

Although the government does collect billions each year in fines, penalties and restitution - including hundreds of millions in long-outstanding debt - success rates vary from agency to agency, region to region, case to case.

In many high-profile cases, fines are touted by authorities as proof that they are cracking down. Yet frequently those orders are quietly negotiated to just a fraction of their original amounts - as if drivers, faced with fines for speeding, offered the traffic court judge pennies on the dollar, and the judge agreed.

Documents provided to the AP by the Labor Department's Employment Benefits Security Administration, whose job is to protect pension and welfare benefits, showed that \$2,000 was the maximum amount paid on nearly a dozen penalties ranging from \$86,500 to \$180,000; these were for various kinds of violations, everything from failure to file reports to self-dealing by pension fund managers.

Why the reductions? Officials explained that compliance is the agency's goal, and that the law allows penalties to be reduced when companies make amends. Violators who don't comply risk being referred to the Treasury Department,

which can collect by seizing federal benefits.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration's written policy explains to inspectors that they can reduce penalties by as much as 95 percent, "depending upon the employer's 'good faith,' (25 percent) 'size of business,' (60 percent) and 'history of previous violations.' (10 percent)"

Internal documents from U.S. Customs show that dramatically large fines may be cut sharply.

Agency documents released under AP's FOIA request listed, for example, a \$60,911,316 "commercial fraud" assessment for one company - but the case ended with a \$15,000 collection by Customs.

The company, Richemont North America, contradicted the Customs reports, saying the case never reached the point of an actual, multimillion dollar fine.

Admittedly, some paperwork was not in order, company lawyer Alan Grieve said, but he added: "Ultimately, the size of the settlement does reflect the fact that Richemont had no major problem at all."

The Energy Department routinely issues substantial fines it isn't even allowed to collect.

Federal law exempts the national nuclear laboratories from most financial liability, but the Energy Department has issued some \$2.5 million in fines against Los Alamos, Livermore and Argonne national laboratories since 2000. The fines - issued and waived in the same sentence - involved 31 different workers who inhaled or touched radioactive or toxic materials.

In 2004, Energy's National Nuclear Safety Department fined Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico \$770,000 for five separate violations after two workers were exposed to dangerously high levels of plutonium. The violation notices add in parentheses: "Waived by Statute."

"This is kind of an exercise in absurdity," said Greg Mello, who heads the Los Alamos Study Group, a nuclear disarmament activist organization in Albuquerque.

Even so, the Energy Department includes the fines in its annual reports to Congress and often announces them in press releases.

Last year, Congress tightened the rules so that as nuclear laboratory contracts are renewed, the fine waivers are eliminated. Eventually, said DOE spokesman Jeff Sherwood, nuclear labs will have to pay imposed fines.

The reason DOE issued fines it could not collect was to show what the problems were and how bad, he said: "A \$1 million fine says something different than a \$10,000 fine."

Financial penalties are regularly touted by agencies and prosecutors as a strict consequence of lawbreaking. The message - that violators can expect to pay dearly - can be misleading.

The Office of Pipeline Safety, a Transportation Department bureau, is one of a number of agencies chastised by members of Congress for failing to follow through on enforcement.

Nearly seven years ago, a pipeline ruptured, spilling 230,000 gallons of gasoline into a creek near Bellingham, Wash. The fuel exploded into a fireball that ravaged the surrounding woods. And it killed two 10-year-old boys playing in the woods and a young man, 18, who had gone to the stream to fish.

Authorities vowed to punish those at fault, and indeed some company officials eventually served prison time.

But on June 2, 2000, the Transportation Department issued a forceful press release, announcing a \$3.05 million administrative penalty against the pipeline owner, Olympic Pipe Line Co. This, it said, was the largest in the history of the federal pipeline safety program.

"Tragic events like this pipeline failure must never happen again," then-Transportation Secretary Rodney E. Slater said at the time. "This civil penalty is one of a series of actions we have and are taking to help protect the people and environment."

But last year, with the memorials in place, fish returning to the creek and the forest budding with new growth, the penalty was quietly reduced to \$250,000.

"They let them off with a slap," said Carl Weiner, who heads the Bellingham-based Pipeline Safety Trust.

Olympic Pipe Line officials disagree, saying they already paid \$11 million in state and Justice Department assessments and \$15 million in restoration and improvements.

Still, the case illustrates how the value of assessed penalties is merely a starting point for some officials.

The Environmental Protection Agency, for example, is often willing to reduce penalties in exchange for polluters agreeing to spend money cleaning up.

"We trade off a portion of the penalty in return for them doing supplemental environmental projects," said the EPA's Tom Skinner.

The recent West Virginia coal mine deaths focused new criticism on enforcement tradeoffs made by mine safety inspectors.

During hearings in January, Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., voiced outrage at how coal operators can whittle down fines. He cited assessments by the Mine Safety and Health Administration against a company in an Alabama mine where 13 people were killed in 2001.

"Incredibly, ... an Administrative Law Judge reduced these fines from \$435,000 to a mere \$3,000 - a decision that harms workers and erodes MSHA's authority," Specter and three fellow senators elaborated in a letter to Labor Secretary Elaine Chao.

The Labor Department later announced plans to raise fine amounts, and in a case it called "precedent-setting" sought an injunction against a Kentucky mine operator and two companies he owns, which paid nothing on \$200,000 in penalties.

AP's Freedom of Information filing turned up numerous cases in which administrative penalties were ordered against mining companies for dangerous laxness in following rules - and yet records showed many went unpaid. Sometimes, in the narrow-margin world of small coal companies, the violator escaped paying by declaring bankruptcy or ceasing operations.

On Feb. 20, 2002, near Rupert, W.Va., a section of mine roof up to 10 feet thick collapsed, killing one miner and seriously injuring another. It took more than four hours to dig them out.

The MSHA investigators' report concluded: "Root cause - Mine management condoned unsafe work practices and ... demonstrated a reckless disregard of the dangers posed by conditions created when faulty pillar recovery methods were used." Some supervisors were eventually ordered jailed and fined, prosecutors said; two companies that ran the mine were placed on a year's probation.

The companies also were hit with \$165,000 in administrative penalties each. But MSHA has no record of any payment four years later. When contacted by AP about why, the agency cited records showing the mine was sealed and, in one case, a bankruptcy filing made.

"They probably figured it wasn't worth it financially to stay in business," said the agency's Allen K. Watson.

When agencies can't get debtors to pay, the Justice Department may get the task of collecting a fine or penalty. But the process is decentralized. The collection legwork falls to the 93 U.S. Attorney offices around the country, where "financial litigation units" have the task of pursuing the money.

Although the backlog of uncollected debt has drastically increased, from \$6 billion in 1995 to more than \$35 billion in 2004, the number of financial litigation unit lawyers has remained steady, usually just one or two per office, supplemented by paralegals.

Reviewing the adequacy of staffing was one of 14 recommendations made by the GAO in 2001 to improve collection. A followup report two years ago noted progress in streamlining procedures but still said "fragmented processes and lack of coordination" remained.

Until these problems are fully addressed, GAO said then, "the effectiveness of criminal fines and restitution as a punitive tool may be diminished."

An attempt by the prosecutors and court system to create a National Fine Center, centrally coordinating collections across myriad jurisdictions, collapsed and was abandoned a decade ago.

The Justice Department office overseeing U.S. attorneys said it has made strides toward better coordination, including links with Treasury's program to offset certain federal benefits to repay debt. Justice also published a "Prosecutors Guide to Criminal Monetary Penalties."

A major factor in the high rate of uncollected fines and penalties was a change in the law.

The 1996 Victims Mandatory Restitution Act requires judges to order payments regardless of a defendant's ability to pay. It's no coincidence, says Natalie Collins, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Attorney's office in Las Vegas, Nev., that the uncollected debts have steeply increased since the law was passed.

"These people come out of prison with a huge restitution debt and if they can't pay, they have that judgment just hanging over them," she said. "We can't squeeze blood out of a turnip."

That said, some prosecutors' offices are more successful than others in going after the money.

For example, in 2003, Delaware's U.S. Attorney's office was the top collector in the country, bringing in \$365 million in criminal and civil debt and leaving just \$19 million outstanding.

At the other end of the spectrum that year was the Montgomery, Ala., office, which collected \$914,676 and ended 2003 with almost \$30 million uncollected.

Steve Doyle, an assistant U.S. Attorney in Montgomery, said the small office has just one attorney and one paralegal, assigned part-time to collecting debts - which are often uncollectable.

"Other than in white-collar cases, most criminal defendants don't have any money," said Doyle. "We attempt to collect everything that can be collected."

Sometimes even as financial penalties are being ordered, it's obvious that the money is never going to be paid.

"I've had clients who have had millions of dollars of restitution imposed, and every one in the courtroom knows that this person will never be able to pay," said Mike Filipovich, a federal public defender in Seattle.

Five years ago, Filipovich represented Leonard Fridall Terry Antoine, a member of Canada's Cowichan band of the Salish tribe, who was sentenced to two years in prison and ordered to pay \$147,000 for paying people to shoot bald eagles and selling their parts. Prosecutors charged him \$3,000 for each of 49 eagles.

"It is absolutely right that this defendant serve time for such an outright violation of our nation's environmental laws," said Tom Sansonetti, then-Assistant Attorney General of the Department of Justice's Environmental and Natural Resources Division. "The outcome will serve as a deterrent." Antoine was released from prison in 2003, but has not paid any of the fines, according to federal records.

"The reality for most folks," said Filipovich, "is that they simply can't afford to pay."

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EDITORIAL: A penalty in name only.(Editorial).

Blade (Toledo, OH) (March 27, 2006): pNA.

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Mar. 27--The Department of Energy rightfully has the power to issue penalties to energy companies for wrongdoing. But the entire process has been reduced to a farce because the fines are almost invariably reduced and in many cases not even collected.

That's a scandal, especially when you consider that the money owed could fund the Homeland Security department for a year. Why the debt-plagued federal government doesn't put forth the muscle to go after those fees is beyond puzzling.

Take the all-too-typical 1999 case in which DOE handed Olympic Pipe Line Co. a \$3 million fine following the deaths of three young people in Washington state after a gasoline spill and explosion. Ordinarily, the next course of action would be to ask the Department of Justice to see that the fine was collected.

Instead, last year the penalty was reduced to just \$250,000, and that's not atypical. Nor did the DOE collect the \$2.5 million it assessed nuclear labs since 2000 for exposing workers to radiation and breaking safety rules. The fines were waived almost as soon as they were issued.

Would you get the same treatment if you couldn't pay your taxes on time?

While the Victims Mandatory Restitution Act of 1996 requires judges to order payments regardless of a defendant's ability to pay, federal law relieves national nuclear labs from most financial liability.

This exercise was summarized by Greg Mello, head of the anti-nuclear Los Alamos study group, as "kind of an exercise in absurdity." The fines are designed, in part, to give those responsible for errors an incentive to make things better. "A \$1 million fine says something different than a \$10,000 fine," Mr. Mello said.

But it doesn't mean much if nobody is actually required pay. The government certainly could use the funds generated from penalties, which had grown to \$35 billion by 2004, six times the total levied in 1995, a truly staggering sum.

This scandal is compounded by an apparent failure to keep track of who owes what. The DOE needs proper accounting procedures, and an ethical backbone. Crime shouldn't pay, whether the criminal is behind a ski mask or a corporate desk.

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Saturday, April 8, 2006

LANL Needs Skilled Workers

By John Arnold*Journal Staff Writer*

Los Alamos National Laboratory needs more skilled technicians to help with its expanding pit manufacturing program and other jobs, and the state's community colleges can help, a LANL consultant said Friday.

"Manufacturing has not really been a major part of the lab, but it will become a major part of the lab," said the consultant, Abad Sandoval. "So we've got a lot of people working, or will be working, in manufacturing who really need to become certified and retrained."

About 40 representatives from most of the state's 18 community colleges and university branch campuses will attend a work force training forum at Santa Fe Community College Monday to hear more about work force needs at LANL, Sandia National Laboratories, PNM and Intel.

Two items on the agenda list LANL pit manufacturing as topics, although a spokesman from the lab's public affairs office said the agenda is misleading.

While the LANL officials scheduled to speak at the forum work in the lab's pit manufacturing program, they won't be talking about it, according to lab spokesman Kevin Roark.

"All they're going to talk about is the kinds of skills that are needed at a place like Los Alamos," he said. "... this is just a meeting of the minds to let these officials at the community colleges know what the general overall needs are, with the hope that what comes out of it is the development of programs and curricula that helps meet those needs."

Pits are the grapefruit-size plutonium cores of nuclear bombs. LANL is playing a key role in the U.S. Department of Energy's plans to overhaul the country's nuclear weapons program, under which Los Alamos will serve as an interim pit manufacturing facility until a permanent one can be built.

According to the DOE's plan, outlined Wednesday by National Nuclear Security Administration deputy administrator Thomas D'Agostino, LANL would manufacture between 30 and 50 pits per year beginning in 2012, before the yet-to-be-determined permanent site comes on line. A more modest pit production operation—capable of producing 10 pits per year—will be ready to go next year, according to D'Agostino.

Frank Renz, executive director of the New Mexico Association of Community Colleges, said an aging work force was a big driving force behind Monday's forum. Renz—who, along with LANL consultant Sandoval, helped organize the forum—expects to learn more about the expansion of LANL's pit production program and the skills the lab will require from workers.

"That's definitely part of the program (Monday)," he said. "The community college representatives who are coming are going to hear more about those requirements so that they can gear up, if they're not already geared up, to producing more skilled workers to help with the ramp up (in pit production)."

LANL isn't the only institution in need of skilled technicians who support scientists and engineers. Machinists, welders, electrical and chemical maintenance workers and similarly skilled workers— especially those with math and science skills— are in high demand, Sandoval said.

The community colleges can play a role in training such workers and provide a needed boost to the state's economy, he said.

The lab has often reached out to the state's community colleges, offering resources for programs that train machinists, informational technology workers and others, said Sheila Ortego, Santa Fe Community College's executive vice president.

Ortego said LANL and Sandia may be interested in providing support for technician training programs, but those programs wouldn't just benefit the labs.

"This would be the kind of general technician training that could be applied to many industries, if we can get it off the ground," she said. "... and so if they can assist us then everyone benefits, including other industries not even associated with the lab."

But anti-nuclear activists say jobs in pit production are not only dangerous, they run contrary to the country's international nonproliferation obligations. Training dollars would be better directed to fields like health care, education and renewable resources, said Greg Mello, executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group.

"As long as we keep spending hundreds of billions on the military, and corrupting our educational and training institutions to serve the military, we won't be building the job opportunities we really need," he said.

Bomb making is controversial, Sandoval acknowledged, but the lab is a key contributor to northern New Mexico's economy.

"Everyone to his or her own opinion," he said. "These are good jobs."

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Chernobyl's lessons

Death looms over the Ukrainian landscape, 20 years after a human error unleashed a radioactive nightmare

By Trish Williams-Mello ^{5/10/06} A. Tribune

Climbing into an ancient relic of a bus in front of the hotel in Kiev, Ukraine, I somewhat hesitantly began my trip to the 30-kilometer exclusion zone surrounding the ruins of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant.

Along with many of my colleagues, there last month for the anniversary of the world's worst nuclear power plant accident, I felt as if we were traveling through a time warp back to the early 1980s, back to the Cold War, prior to glasnost and perestroika and everything since.

Two hours north of Kiev we arrived at the security gate on the border of the exclusion zone. We began our tour with a briefing at the *Chernobylinterinform*, a public relations office, after which we continued on into the exclusion zone.

We were able to leave the bus and walk around in only a few areas within the zone, after being strictly warned not to walk on or touch any of the vegetation.

Walking around Pripyat, once an elegant and rather elaborate city built to house Chernobyl's workers and now a ruin, the only sound that broke the silence was the interminable clicking of my colleagues' radiation monitors.

It was as though a death shroud was still spread over the entire region — suffocating what sparse life was left. Where were the wild horses and other wildlife I was told to expect?

I could count on one hand the living beings that I saw there — a bird, a bug and one very strange-looking dog.

TODAY'S BYLINE

Williams-Mello is operations director for the Los Alamos Study Group, a nuclear weapons watchdog group in Albuquerque.

Today there are only 338 of the original 200,000 residents living within the exclusion zone, these few having returned illegally in spite of the contamination. They do not want to leave their homeland despite the unseen dangers of the radiation.

The accident, caused by human errors and poor design, climaxed when an explosion ripped through the No. 4 reactor at Chernobyl at 1:23 a.m. on April 26, 1986. It left its mark on the world, most severely on Ukraine and its neighbors Belarus and Russia, but also on other European countries, which received more than half of the contaminants released.

Radioactive gases, fuel and debris from the reactor were also hurled into the atmosphere. More than 1,800 tons of carbon within the reactor ignited and burned for nearly 10 days. It has been difficult to determine the precise amounts of contaminants released and number of persons affected because of the secrecy, falsified medical data and inaccurate records.

As I traveled through the region, I became aware that the veil of secrecy surrounding the accident and its aftermath has only partially been lifted, even after 20 years.

During the three-day conference that I attended in Kiev later that week there

were many discussions about the struggle for truth surrounding the Chernobyl disaster. The full human cost is just beginning to be understood.

There have been numerous reports released about Chernobyl with greatly differing predictions of morbidity and mortality. Two recent studies, one commissioned by the European Parliament and one by Greenpeace International, estimate excess cancer deaths at 30,000 to 60,000 and somewhat greater than 90,000, respectively. In contrast, the International Atomic Energy Agency, known to be a supporter of nuclear energy, reports only 4,000.

It is honestly very hard for anyone to put this much devastation and contamination into context unless you have seen it.

Standing outside the fence in front of the sarcophagus over the damaged reactor, one imagines a tornado or hurricane having struck this facility, carrying its deadly nuclear guts up into the atmosphere to ride the clouds as an angel of death, spreading deadly hands of disease and deformity over a vast area.

It reminded me of a biblical plague, one that will continue to kill, deform, devastate and contaminate for many generations to come — the people first, but also their homeland.

People making decisions about nuclear power must think how their decisions today could affect the world many generations into the future — as did the American Indians. One mistake, one human error, and all future generations will suffer.

FUELING BRAINS

Forget \$100; we need long-term incentives to solve gas crisis

With calls in Congress to investigate whether oil companies such as Exxon are price gouging and causing our \$3-a-gallon gas, it's important to have a bit of mental and political balance.

Get this: Exxon and other oil companies only make about 7 cents off every gallon of gas sold. Seven cents. The rest is taxes and other stuff.

The \$7 billion profit posted by Exxon last quarter is most likely a direct result of selling a whole lot of gas, not price gouging.

It's fine and dandy to look into the issue, because when it comes to basic needs such as fuel, no price gouging should be allowed.

Whereas, with things like, say, Hummers, price gouging should be encouraged. In fact, we should impose a hefty Stupid Tax.

But, speaking of stupid, the government reaction the past several weeks to the increasing fuel prices looked to me like absurd flailing about by panicked elected officials.

The pointless ideas include giving us all of \$100 for gas and stopping the inflow of gas into the national oil reserves. Never mind that we're paying, on average, \$1,800 more a year for gas than in February 2003.

Not a single idea proposed has done anything to address the long-term crisis. Republicans would have us think we could solve the problem by drilling into the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which is laughable.

By most estimates, the gas under the ground there is actually "economically recoverable" might last us a couple of years at most. The National Resources Defense Council says it would keep us going less than a year — and it would take 10 years to get it out of the ground.

Democrats and Republicans alike just want to ease Americans' troubled minds so we all continue with our summer vacation plans and keep buying enough stuff to keep our consumer economy afloat.



Kristen Davenport

Commentary

A rare few, including U.S. Rep. Tom Udall of Santa Fe, are trying to take a longer view. Democrat Udall is co-founder of the Congressional Peak Oil Caucus, along with Republican Rep. Roscoe Bartlett of Maryland.

To their enormous credit, Udall and Bartlett are urging some more meaningful proposals, including a repeal of all tax subsidies for oil and gas and redirecting that money to alternative energy incentives.

Otherwise, it seems we're a nation of people with our collective head in the sand.

The government policies we need are not only those that pursue clean and renewable technologies but also those promoting a way of life that reduces our reliance on fuel in general, whether it's biofuel or crude.

We need policies that provide sustainable systems — as my friend and anti-nuclear activist Greg Mello says, policies that give the city of Clayton an incentive to build windmills to power the city.

Create incentives for people to use solar power or otherwise save natural gas in their homes and gas in their cars. Give them other ways to get to work. Invest in technologies that exist as well as those that don't quite yet. Keep my \$100. Just spend it on something smart, for once, why don't you?

Davenport is a syndicated columnist. She lives in Truchas. Copyright 2006, New Mexico News Services.

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Thursday, June 1, 2006

LANL Now Under Control of LANS

By **John Arnold***Journal Staff Writer*

LOS ALAMOS— On the eve of historic change, it was pretty much business as usual here on Wednesday.

"It's not like tomorrow will come and a brick wall is going to go up and everything's going to be new and different," Los Alamos National Laboratory employee Valerie Miller said during lunch at a local eatery. "Life goes on, and the work will continue."

It will continue under new management for the first time in LANL's 63-year history. Los Alamos National Security, a limited liability corporation known as LANS, assumes control of the nuclear weapons laboratory today, marking a new era for the birthplace of the atomic bomb.

"This is huge," new lab director Michael Anastasio said as he scurried between meetings Wednesday. "This is a big change for all of us."

Some employees, like Miller, are embracing it. Others remain apprehensive about what it means for their jobs and the culture here, where the University of California has run the show since the days of the Manhattan Project.

UC is still involved in managing the, lab but will be doing so with a team of industrial partners led by engineering giant Bechtel National.

"I guess it's just the fear of the unknown," said a 17-year lab employee who declined to give her name.

Today marks the end of a six-month transition period in which Los Alamos National Security and UC managers sought to ease such anxieties. Transition teams have been working to address employee concerns and questions, as well as to make sure the lab continues to run smoothly under a shuffled management structure, according to LANS spokesman Jeff Berger.

Of the lab's 21 senior managers, just four were previously employed at the lab.

Anastasio said that employees can expect to see him and his management team "out and about" meeting fellow workers.

"Our sense is the employees are anxious to get on with it, and so are we," said Anastasio, who left his post as director of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory to run LANL. "The transition has been plenty long."

And it hasn't been without controversy.

Nearly all lab employees were guaranteed jobs under the new contract, along with benefits packages that DOE declared "substantially equivalent" to existing UC benefits.

But a LANL labor union disagreed and in April filed a federal lawsuit

challenging the legality of the new benefits.

The management change "has definitely caused a lot of people a lot of stress," said Brady Gibbons, a LANL scientist who is leaving the lab this summer to become a college professor.

MIT anthropology professor Hugh Gusterson, who has studied the lab's culture and people, said that anxiety during periods of institutional change is understandable, especially given LANL's recent history.

In the wake of several embarrassing security and fiscal problems at the lab—from the Wen Ho Lee case and missing hard drives containing nuclear secrets to the theft of hundreds of thousands of dollars of equipment by two high-ranking lab workers—then-Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham announced in 2003 that LANL's contract would be put up for bid.

In 2004, then-LANL director Pete Nanos brought lab operations to a halt over security and safety concerns.

"In the end, it doesn't matter so much whether the bid went back to UC with Bechtel, or whether it went to (bid competitor) Lockheed Martin," Gusterson said. "The question is whether the whole process of putting the contract up for bid shook things up, and I think it's too early to tell."

But Greg Mello, director of lab watchdog organization the Los Alamos Study Group, thinks today's management change symbolizes bigger changes in the nuclear weapons complex. He said control of the complex is becoming increasingly concentrated in "a small club" of corporations.

LANS' contract with DOE is worth up to \$512 million over seven years, with a provision to extend it to 20 years.

"So it's not just the end of an era at Los Alamos, it's part of a changing landscape in the nuclear weapons business," said Mello.

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Thursday, June 1, 2006

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IG questions warhead schedule

ROGER SNODGRASS, roger@lamonitor.com, Monitor Assistant Editor

A new report from the Energy Department's Inspector General has found delays, cost increases and management shortcomings related to extending the life of the W76 nuclear warhead.

Seven nuclear weapons facilities, including Los Alamos and Sandia national laboratories in New Mexico, are engaged in the project to refurbish the warhead under a stockpile stewardship activity known as life extension.

LANL and Y-12 National Security Complex both encountered delays in testing activities, the report said, that had reduced the scope of the current project for revitalizing the W76, used with submarine-launched Trident missiles.

At LANL, the IG reported from two years ago, a number of component tests, including six hydrotests and nine intermediate-scale tests were scheduled for completion in advance of a Final Design Review. Two of these hydrotests were not completed; one was cancelled and the other was conducted in June 2005, but a month after the Final Design Review in May 2005.

The hydrotest was conducted at LANL's Dual Axis Radiographic Hydrodynamic Test Facility (DARHT), a flash X-ray device that provides high-resolution X-ray images of imploding mock-ups of weapons components.

A spokesman for LANL said this morning the lab is confident the deadline for delivering the first W76 production unit will be met by the deadline of Sept. 30,

2007.

"We believe that the necessary project controls for the W76 program are in place and that the program is healthy," said Kevin Roark in the LANL communications office this morning.

In reply to the Inspector General's audit, the National Nuclear Security Administration wrote that the nuclear weapons management agency "believes that the appropriate management tools and management focus are in place to ensure successful execution of the W76 refurbishment."

The response continued, "Although there have been some schedule delays - many of them, as noted by the IG, out of the program's control, we believe there will be no significant impact on full-scale production."

The issue of schedule delays is addressed in the audit.

"Some delays and deviations occurred due to circumstances outside NNSA's control," the IG acknowledged, but added that those circumstances have already been discounted from the report.

"Rather, this report addresses delays and scope deviations that were, in our judgment, directly related to weaknesses in project management," wrote the auditors.

The audit also describes an inability of three out of four sites to reconcile the costs reported to Congress or explain variances ranging from \$200,000 to \$2 million. The report criticizes inadequate documentation and coordination of changes in the plans.

The audit found an increase in the total cost, as of December 2004, through FY 2022 of \$639 million or 28 percent of the estimated project cost, but noted that only \$84 million of that amount is formally documented.

"According to an NNSA official," the authors reported, "efficient verbal communications made change control process documentation less necessary."

Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group pointed out that NNSA's response included a total cost estimate as of FY 2007 of \$2.649 billion, which amounts to a five-year cost increase of 42 percent over the initial projection of \$1.86 billion.

The audit is published at a time when nuclear weapons managers and Congress are questioning the sustainability of the current system of stockpiling nuclear weapons. Some officials are proposing instead an alternative system, designed around a Reliable Replacement Warhead, that is supposed to be longer lasting and easier and less expensive to maintain.

The idea of stockpile stewardship, that grew out of the U.S. moratorium on nuclear testing, was to maintain a sufficient number of nuclear weapons that could be used over a longer lifetime without returning to nuclear testing.

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Atlas power project at LANL stalls again

ROGER SNODGRASS, roger@lamonitor.com, Monitor Assistant Editor

After several premature reports of its demise, a controversial component of the stockpile stewardship program, the Atlas Pulsed Power Experimental Facility, is about to go dormant.

Brian Wilkes, at NNSA headquarters said this morning that no additional funds would be requested for FY07, the budget year that begins Oct. 1.

"We're not requesting any funds for it, but not planning on moving it out either," he said.

The withdrawal of support was ascribed to changing budget priorities.

"There are a number of programs that we consider more critical than Atlas," Wilkes said.

He said some of Atlas' funds would go to Jasper, (the Joint Actinide Shock Physics Experimental Research "gas gun") and to the Device Assembly Facility (DAF), a "super-secure" site at NTS where a number of testing and assembly functions have been consolidated.

Construction of the \$49 million Atlas facility began at LANL in 1995 and was completed in 2000 on budget and on schedule. But it was already facing funding problems.

According to an Inspector General Report in 2001, officials from the Defense Programs Office of the Department of Energy began saying they could not afford to operate Atlas and requested its termination in February 2000, when it was about 90 percent

completed.

In response to objections from Los Alamos, DOE decided to complete the construction, perform readiness testing and then place the facility into cold standby.

Later that year, Congress found the money to move the whole facility to the Nevada Test Site, but said "the move should be to a storage facility in Nevada," because "Defense Programs do not currently have funds or plans to reassemble and operate Atlas in Nevada."

Nevertheless, the 30-million-amp power facility was moved to NTS where it was revived in a new 14,000 square-foot high-bay building.

The physical relocation was finished in April 2004, at a cost for the move and building of \$20.4 million, but the electrical work, delayed by a lengthy suspension of operations at LANL, was not finished until July 2005.

LANL continued to manage the physics and test program, while Bechtel National, operated and maintained the machine and facility, according to an announcement by the test site at that time. Bechtel National is now one of the managing partners at Los Alamos.

"The technical staff members who support Atlas also have skills used in Jasper, subcritical experiments and other projects at NTS," said Wilkes. "No one is going to be losing a job."

He said the decision to move Atlas from Los Alamos to NTS was made before deficit reduction became such a high priority throughout the government.

Atlas stores electrical power slowly over a period of time and then releases it in a massive jolt that lasts only a few millionths of a second.

The shock wave creates an implosion that researchers have used to validate computer codes and analyze materials under extreme pressures, comparable to a nuclear explosion.

The stockpile stewardship program, one of the fundamental projects of the nation's weapons laboratories for the last decade, is intended to study, refurbish and lengthen the lifetime of existing nuclear weapons without nuclear testing.

Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group said a coalition of anti-nuclear groups had argued in a court case in 1998 that Atlas was not needed to maintain the stockpile.

"The project means different things to the scientists and to the weapons program," Mello said Tuesday. "To some scientists, this was their career, but from Washington's perspective it was a political football from the get-go."

An article in the current Physics Today magazine, "Atlas shrugged off at Nevada Test Site," quotes Irv Lindemuth, a retired LANL physicist and former project leader in pulsed-power science, who was also one of the leaders in the U.S.-Russian exchange program.

Reached by telephone this morning in Chama, Lindemuth said he objected to the decision on at least two counts.

"The demise of little science because of fascination with big machines is in my opinion a national scandal," he said.

He was also concerned about how the decision would affect a 14-year-old collaboration with Russia.

"That exchange with Russia has exceeded the technical accomplishments of any other program between the two nations, because of a reciprocal access to facilities," Lindemuth said. "If Atlas shuts down, it's not clear whether it will continue, because it's not clear what the U.S. has to offer them."

Atlas power project at LANL stalls again

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Monitor Assistant Editor

6/27/06

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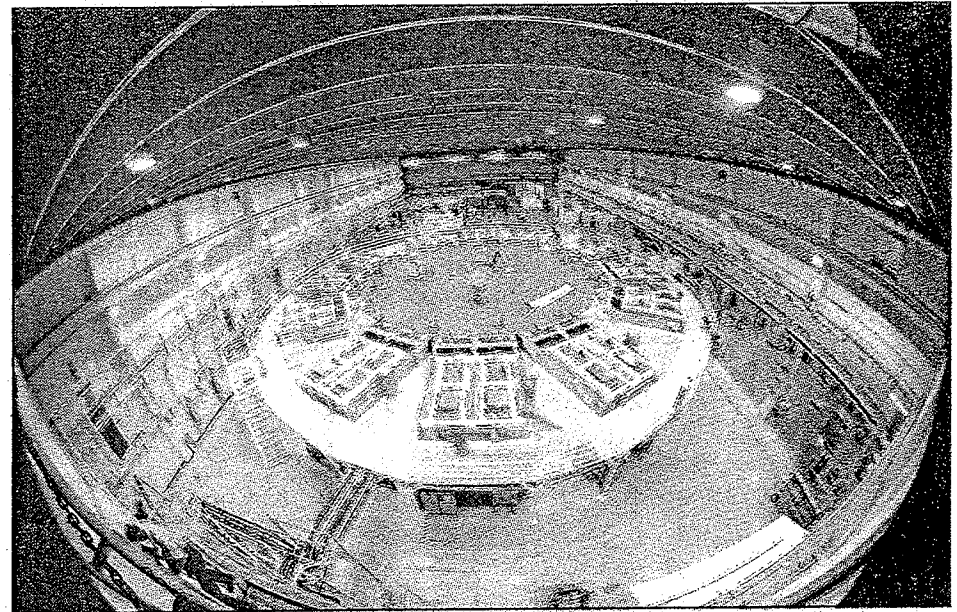
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See **POWER**, 2



LEROY N. SANCHEZ/LANL

UNPLUGGED NNSA has pulled the plug on Atlas, the pulsed-power generator that was completed in late 2000 and moved from Los Alamos to the Nevada Test Site in August 2002. In July 2005 the laboratory announced that it had succeeded in generating a current about four times greater than all the electric power on earth.

POWER Atlas project stalls again

From Page 1

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New Mexico & The West

Preserving LANL's Atomic Heritage



EDDIE MOORE/JOURNAL

Miller Lodge is among the structures in Los Alamos that have connections to the Manhattan Project.

■ *Including Manhattan Project facilities in the national park system is under study*

BY JOHN ARNOLD
Journal Staff Writer

Cindy Kelly was working for the U.S. Department of Energy in the 1990s when she first became aware that remnants of the Manhattan Project — the government's top secret quest to build the atomic bomb during World War II — were "doomed for demolition."

"As a history major," she said

in a recent interview, "I was a little bit appalled, thinking 'Why aren't they saving one or two?'"

Kelly left the DOE and in 2002 founded the Atomic Heritage Foundation, an organization dedicated to preserving Manhattan Project buildings, including those that have survived the wrecking ball at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Thanks in large part to the foundation's research and recommendations, the federal government is now investigating whether parts of Los Alamos and other Manhattan Project sites should become part of the national park system.

Beginning in 1942, the nation's top scientists embarked on a race against Nazi researchers to develop an atomic bomb. The project, which employed some 130,000 people at its peak, ended in August 1945 when the U.S. dropped two bombs — dubbed Fat Man and Little Boy — on Japan.

Park Service representatives visited Los Alamos and Santa Fe last week to learn how local residents feel about Park Service involvement with Manhattan Project sites. Locations in Hanford, Wash., Oak Ridge, Tenn., and Dayton, Ohio, are also under consideration.

Legislation sponsored by Sens. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., and Pete Domenici, R-N.M., and signed by President Bush in 2004, directed the Park Service to evaluate the feasibility of bringing one or more sites into the park system.

"We're trying to determine what role the park service should have in telling the story of the Manhattan Project," said Carla McConnell, a project manager in the Park Service's Denver office.

The task, however, presents unique challenges for McConnell's team. Not only must they consider how four different

See **PRESERVING** on **PAGE B4**

Preserving Manhattan Project Facilities Studied

from PAGE B1

geographic locations can be tied together, they must consider sites within each of those locations that are spread apart — some of them in secure areas currently inaccessible to the public.

Take LANL's V Site, for example — “probably the singular most important” set of Manhattan Project buildings at the lab, according to Ellen McGehee, LANL's historic buildings project leader, who is spearheading a lab effort to identify and restore historically significant LANL sites.

Of about 30 existing Manhattan Project facilities at the lab, McGehee has identified five within the security perimeter that best represent the Manhattan Project story.

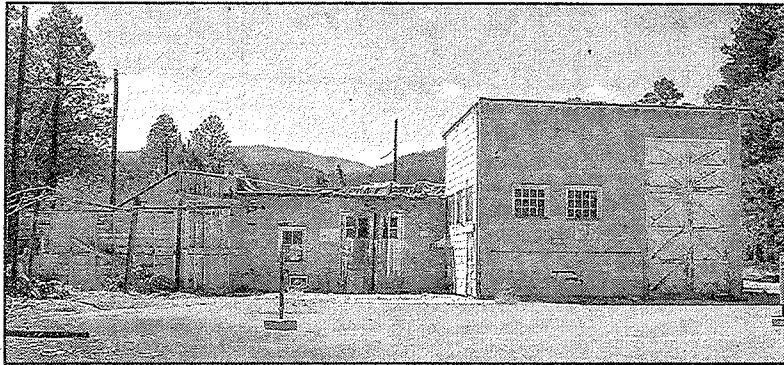
Among them is V Site, where more than 50 years ago, scientists worked feverishly to develop and assemble the plutonium bomb tested at southern New Mexico's Trinity Site in July 1945. A similar bomb, Fat Man, was dropped on the Japanese city of Nagasaki a month later.

Four of V Site's six buildings were destroyed by the 2000 Cerro Grande fire, McGehee said. And the others were falling apart until last year when the lab began restoring them with the help of a \$700,000 Save America's Treasures grant.

That project is nearing completion, and McGehee now has her sights set on restoring the so-called Gun Site, a crumbling concrete bunker where atomic scientists developed Little Boy, the gun-type uranium bomb detonated over Hiroshima.

But Gun Site and the others are all in areas off limits to the public.

“That's actually the question everyone asks me,” McGehee said at a meeting on the Park Service's study last



Manhattan Project buildings still stand at Los Alamos National Laboratory's V Site, where scientists worked to assemble the bomb tested in 1945 at southern New Mexico's Trinity Site. This photo was taken before renovations began late last year.

week. “Why are you restoring these if no one can see them?”

But McGehee and other preservationists say its impossible to know where the security fence will be in the future, especially as the lab consolidates operations.

“We are going to hopefully be able to take the long view and say (the buildings) are behind the fence now, but they are not always going to be,” Kelly said.

Preservationists are also quick to point out that, while a handful of historically significant buildings sit behind the fence, many more fill the Los Alamos town site, where a rustic and remote boys boarding school was transformed virtually overnight into a secret scientific community of thousands.

“This story of how (the government) created these secret communities and kept them secret is an important part of the story,” the Park Service's McConnell said.

Some of the most historically impor-

tant town site buildings have already been purchased and protected by either preservationists or local government.

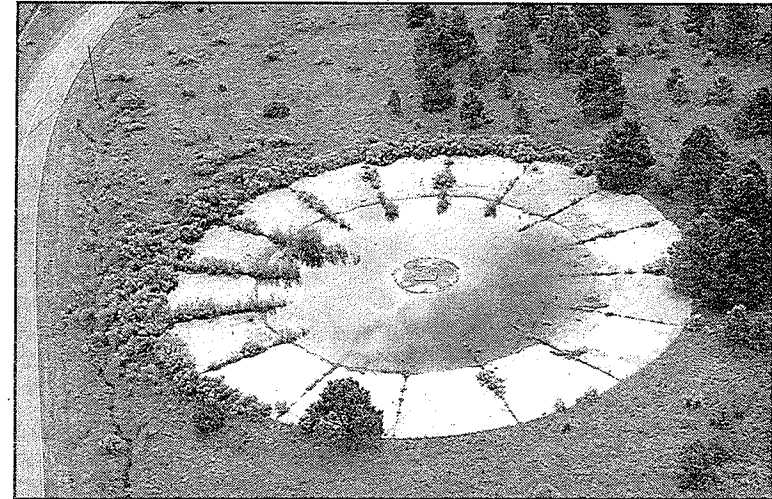
Los Alamos County government, for example, owns Fuller Lodge, the former boys school headquarters that served as guest quarters and a mess hall during the Manhattan Project.

And the Los Alamos Historical Society in recent years bought the former home of J. Robert Oppenheimer, the lab's first director.

Society President Nancy Bartlit says Park Service involvement is needed to link Los Alamos' role in the Manhattan Project to other project sites — like the uranium and plutonium production facilities at Hanford and Oak Ridge.

“We each tell our own part of (the Manhattan Project story), but we don't tell the whole story,” Bartlit said last week. “The Park Service can unify us.”

McConnell says it may be 2008 before the Park Service presents



This “concrete bowl,” 200 feet in diameter, was built at Los Alamos in 1945 and used in plutonium recovery tests as scientists worked to develop the atomic bomb. It is among the Manhattan Project sites being considered for addition to the National Park system.

options to Congress on how, if at all, the Interior Department agency could be involved with Manhattan Project sites.

Some question why such involvement is on the table at all, considering the Park Service's budgetary concerns. The Government Accountability Office, an investigative arm of Congress, reported in April that many parks are responding to flat budgets and rising costs by cutting or eliminating services.

“Why are you wasting money on this project, which as I've said I think is highly politicized from the get-go, when the Park Service has such little money available?” anti-nuclear activist Greg Mello wrote in a statement to the Park Service.

McConnell said Thursday she had

also received comments from people who say Park Service involvement would be “glorifying” the death and destruction caused by the atomic bomb.

But Kelly of the Atomic Heritage Foundation says the Manhattan Project is an important history lesson that can offer insight to present-day nuclear debates.

“Because you can't look at a newspaper without the words ‘weapons mass destruction’ and ‘enriched uranium,’” she said by phone from her office in Washington, D.C. “What does this all mean? How does a bomb get built? How do we put this in perspective? All those questions are so important for people to have a better grasp of what's going on and how it began.”

SUBMITT



Sandia, Los Alamos explosives untested, at risk for theft

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[Sandia National Laboratories](#)

By JENNIFER TALHELM | Associated Press
June 28, 2006

WASHINGTON (AP) - Hundreds of non-nuclear explosive devices are untested or unaccounted for due to poor record keeping at New Mexico's Sandia and Los Alamos national laboratories, a federal audit found Wednesday.

The Department of Energy's Office of Inspector General, who examined the labs' inventory and testing of explosives between April 2005 and March, said the problems increase the risk that the rockets, gun rounds and other items could be stolen or injure workers.

For example, Sandia officials could not account for at least 410 items, including detonators, rocket motors, shaped explosives and bulk explosive powders.

And both labs _ which regularly use explosives for defense research _ have far more explosives than they need. But they have failed to regularly test the safety and stability of most of the items.

"Without improvements in this critical area, there is increased risk that worker safety may be compromised and that extremely dangerous and potentially destructive materials may be subject to theft or diversion," auditors wrote.

Officials said they already are working to fix the problems by updating guidelines and software and improving inventory and management practices.

But they disagreed that the explosives were at risk for theft.

Sandia spokesman Michael Padilla said lab officials always knew where the items were. The problem was that employees weren't always recording the location.

"We are on Kirtland Air Force Base. Security is very high," Padilla said. "Anyone who is using the material has to have the right or need to use the material."

Auditors said Sandia didn't adequately inventory its explosives when they were being used at locations not on lab property, like military sites and universities. The Albuquerque-based lab frequently could not find or track several items.

In one example, auditors found almost 190,000 pounds of explosive propellant contained in 39 rocket motors owned by Sandia that were stored at a federal facility but not listed in the lab's inventory system.

"Had a theft occurred at one of the nonfederal, offsite locations included in our review, it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to accurately identify the type and extent of stolen department materials," auditors wrote.

At Los Alamos lab, auditors found that officials were storing old, dated explosives, including 63 anti-personnel rockets that were acquired by the lab in 1986. The rockets contained enough propellant to burn for a maximum range of 6,500 yards.

Auditors said that one Los Alamos official said the material was "almost like gold" and kept it even though it was last tested 10 years earlier and there were no plans to use it.

Auditors said lab officials should have limited the number explosives to what was needed for research and that federal officials should have caught the problems long ago.

They said California's Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory did not have the same inventory concerns, and it should be an example for the New Mexico labs.

Los Alamos spokeswoman Kathy DeLucas said lab employees have always followed DOE guidelines, but they will work to enhance safety measures.

"We agree it's important to maintain a minimum amount (of explosives) and reduce the excess material," she said. "But some of these materials are unique and difficult to purchase."

Greg Mello, director of the Los Alamos Study Group, a watchdog organization, said the audit confirms stories New Mexicans have told about lab employees' relaxed attitude toward explosives.

"This is not so good. There is a lot of material, and it's diverse," Mello said. "It only takes a tiny bit of high explosives to cause a terrible tragedy."



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LANL program gets help from Senate committee

[print](#)

By ANDY LENDERMAN | The New Mexican
June 30, 2006

A new chemistry building and environmental cleanup programs at Los Alamos National Laboratory got big boosts Thursday from the Senate Appropriations Committee.

 Big Picture

U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., included in a bill \$112.4 million for the lab's new Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Facility, "a state-of-the-art nuclear laboratory" that Domenici has called the largest building project ever undertaken by the Department of Energy.

He also boosted environmental-cleanup programs at Los Alamos for \$141 million, a \$50 million increase over President Bush's budget request.

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The Energy and Water Development Appropriations Bill for the 2007 fiscal year must be approved by the full Senate before moving to the House of Representatives, which has been more conservative on lab funding in recent years. It passed the Senate Appropriations Committee on Thursday.

The \$30.7 billion measure would fund the Department of Energy, the Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation.

Domenici said the new building "will play an important role for the complex today, as well as the complex of the future."

Domenici broke ground on the project in January.

"Without what goes on in this building, the existing (nuclear-weapons) stockpile cannot be certified, and the state of the stockpile cannot be verified," Domenici said then.

However, a House subcommittee has criticized planning around the project as "irrational."

That's because the department has proposed building a so-called Consolidated

Plutonium Production Center, at a yet undetermined location, by 2022, according to language from the House version of the energy and water-projects bill.

The total cost of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Facility is estimated at nearly \$1 billion, the House Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee reported.

The new building at Los Alamos, which would store special nuclear material, according to the bill, will have its "primary production support function" made obsolete by the planned Consolidated Plutonium Production Center.

"The committee finds this type of planning by the (National Nuclear Security Administration) irrational," the House bill reads.

Jay Coghlan of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, a citizen watchdog group, is opposed to the new building.

"In our view, having that facility built ... makes it much more likely that Los Alamos will end up being the country's permanent site for expanded plutonium pit production," Coghlan said.

A pit is a trigger for a nuclear weapon.

The NNSA has proposed to increase annual pit production at Los Alamos from 20 per year to up to 50 certified pits per year, according to a draft environmental-impact statement released by the agency.

Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group, which opposes nuclear weapons, said the new building at Los Alamos is "a new pit factory for the United States aimed at jump-starting nuclear-weapons production."

However, Mello and Domenici appear to have found some common ground on the extra money for environmental cleanup.

Domenici said the department proposed a deep cut in cleanup funding, which he restored.

"I believe this scenario had the potential to backfire on DOE and increase costs by extending the cost of cleanup and fines," Domenici said.

The department is committed to cleanup at Los Alamos through a mutual consent order with the state of New Mexico.

Domenici also said his bill specifies the department must pay any fines if it fails to follow the consent order. The state could charge between \$8 million and \$35 million in penalties, according to language from Domenici's bill.

"There are many worse places in the DOE where you could spend that

\$50 million," Mello said. "It's a good thing, given the context."

The lab recently reported there are a total of 2,129 contaminated sites there. Of those, 1,365 have been cleaned up and 764 remain, according to the lab. The cost to complete the cleanup is estimated to be more than \$1 billion.

Examples of contaminated sites include dumps, landfills, firing sites and

container-storage areas.

The secretary of the New Mexico Environment Department has urged Domenici and U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., to stop the cuts in cleanup funding proposed by the department.

"This cleanup is crucial to protect the health and environment of New Mexicans for generations to come," Secretary Ron Curry wrote to Domenici and Bingaman earlier this year. " ... I urge you to do what you can to secure the necessary funding to avoid needless penalties and protect our citizenry."



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Los Alamos: Chemical traces found in groundwater

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By ANDY LENDERMAN | The New Mexican

July 8, 2006

LANL says suspected carcinogen has not affected drinking water

Trace amounts of a chemical known as 1,4-dioxane have been discovered in groundwater below Mortandad Canyon, south of Los Alamos. The chemical, which has been classified by the Environmental Protection Agency as a suspected carcinogen, has not been found in the area's aquifer or drinking-water supply, Los Alamos National Laboratory reported late Friday.

The samples of the chemical that were found registered 20 to 50 parts per billion. There are no federal drinking-water standards for 1,4-dioxane, which is a solvent used in paints, cements and varnishes. However, the state of California has recommended closing wells there that have levels of 300 parts per billion.

The lab said in a news release that it had reported the chemical's presence to the New Mexico Environment Department "as part of an overall commitment to transparency in environmental issues."

The chemical was detected in five water samples taken from two monitoring wells in the canyon beginning in June 2005.

The lab said the wells survey two segregated pockets of water, one 450 feet above the aquifer, the other 250 feet above the aquifer.

The lab said the aquifer is 650 feet deep at those points.

Hundreds of other tests from then until early 2006 did not detect the chemical from water samples taken around the laboratory, the lab said.

"It's been more than a year since this was first found, so why are we hearing about it now?" asked Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group, an Albuquerque-based watchdog group.

"Second, it's likely that there were other things disposed of along with dioxane. So I'm sure this won't be the last thing we hear about."

The lab's news release said an investigation will seek to determine the source of the contaminant.

"The big picture is that the water's fine to drink right now," Mello said. "But it's not a good disposal site for chemical and radioactive waste, and Los Alamos shouldn't dispose of nuclear waste there. It's fractured, it's too wet, and it's above New Mexico's ... biggest water supply."

Contact Andy Lenderman at 995-3827

Comments

By C Ortiz (Submitted: 07/08/2006 7:11 am)

URL: http://www.abqjournal.com/santafe/476467north_news07-16-06.htm

Sunday, July 16, 2006

Feds to Have Less Oversight at LANL

By **John Arnold***Journal Staff Writer*

The federal government's oversight role at Los Alamos National Laboratory is changing, and some fear safety will suffer.

Supporters of the changes, however, say they will reduce unnecessary paperwork and red tape that have been impeding work at the nuclear weapons laboratory, now managed by a private company.

Over the years, the government has struggled to find a balance between responsible oversight and intrusive micromanagement of lab operations, according to LANL director Michael Anastasio.

"And the pendulum has swung to a lot more intrusive oversight that really gets in the way of being able to carry out the work," Anastasio said in an interview last month, shortly after his company, Los Alamos National Security, took over the lab's management contract.

The National Nuclear Security Administration wants LANS and its governing board, rather than the federal government, to play a more active role in identifying and correcting operational problems, according to Joe Vozella, who's working on a new oversight model at NNSA's Los Alamos office.

Under the new system, which NNSA officials say is still being defined, the government will set expectations and goals and hold the contractor responsible for meeting those goals safely, Anastasio said.

"Of course, if we don't, then (NNSA will) be more intrusive," he said. "But if we do, then the goal is for (NNSA) to be less intrusive, so that we can use our expertise to figure out the best way to accomplish the goal of being safe and getting mission work done on time."

But such an arrangement could allow LANS to conceal safety and security problems and prevent negative publicity that might threaten its lucrative government contract, said Greg Mello, executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group, a lab watchdog organization.

"It will be looked back on as a disaster," Mello said of the new oversight system. "Why would you give to the contractor not only the responsibility for conducting the inspection but to write the criteria by which it's all evaluated?"

An independent federal safety board has for months been voicing concerns about reduced federal oversight at LANL. In a report dated June 9, Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board representative C.H. Keilers Jr. wrote that NNSA's Los Alamos office "continues to struggle with ensuring adequate oversight of nuclear operations."

An oversight program designed to ensure the safety of lab nuclear facilities— including ventilation systems, fire walls and flood retention structures— "appears defunct," the report states.

And the number of NNSA facilities representatives— federal workers who check on lab facilities for environmental and security problems— has declined from 18 to 12.

Of those 12, just two are fully qualified, Keilers wrote, while others are in the process of becoming certified.

NNSA officials acknowledge that resources and workers are being reassigned to work on

the new oversight model.

Ed Christie, NNSA's facilities representatives team leader in Los Alamos, said he isn't sure whether the number of facility reps will increase or decrease under the new system.

As for the safety system oversight program that Keilers described as defunct, "it still exists," according to John Fredlund, who worked on the program before taking another job at NNSA.

"It just doesn't have as much energy as before," he said. "But definitely everybody is committed to wanting to fix that, because it was a very good success for us."

Congress created NNSA in 2000 in part to "minimize the strangulation of regulation," according to U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M.

But Domenici, who helped create the NNSA, has been frustrated with the agency of late. He thinks NNSA has been burdening the lab managers with "layer upon layer" of unnecessary regulation.

Earlier this year, Domenici said during an address to LANL employees that the agency hasn't lived up to expectations.

"(DOE officials) all know it, that they've got to make the NNSA what it's intended to be, not what it's turned out to be," Domenici said in a recent interview.

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LANL

Domenici seeks more funds for warhead contest

Critics fear nuke program could spark arms race

By Andy Lenderman

The New Mexican

Los Alamos National Laboratory is part of a program that has revitalized the weapons design community, officials say, and received major support from U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M. Domenici is proposing to more than double spending on the Reliable Replacement Warhead program, a nuclear-warhead design competition between **Los Alamos** and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories. "The Reliable Replacement Warhead program is very good for the lab," Domenici said in a statement. "It will focus on finding a better way to carry out existing capabilities. I have confidence in LANL's scientists, and I believe the lab is up for the challenge." Domenici, who chairs the Senate subcommittee that helps fund the nuclear-weapons complex, also has requested a second design competition. The program aims to transform the country's nuclear-weapons stockpile and make it smaller over time. The warhead would be easier to make and maintain, and would be more secure, proponents say. Critics say it's just a way to spend money in **Los Alamos**, and it could spark an arms race with the rest of the world. It's unclear how the program will affect the lab over the long term. The design competition is just a study now Cynthia, lab Director Michael Anastasio said. The government has yet to choose a winning design and stresses it is not a new weapon, but rather replacement parts for an existing

See **WARHEAD**, Page **C-7**

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Warhead: Winning weapon design expected by year's end

Continued from Page C-1

weapon system.

And U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., said the program will be handled by the lab's current work force.

"If LANL is selected, I believe that the work will largely be performed by scientists who are currently working on other projects at the lab," Bingaman said.

"This is much bigger than one lab," said Bryan Wilkes, a spokesman for the National Nuclear Security Administration. "Because if the decision is made to move forward with the reliable-replacement warhead, it will benefit the entire weapons complex and the nation." A decision on the winning design is expected by the end of this year, according to the National Nuclear Security Administration.

"This program is intended to assure the reliability of the stockpile," Domenici's subcommittee reports. "In addition, the laboratory design teams have been charged with developing a weapons system that is much easier to manufacture and maintain, as well as integrating 21st-century use controls to reduce the threat of unintended use." Domenici included \$62.7 million in this year's Energy and Water Appropriations bill for the project, which is \$35 million more than President Bush's administration asked for.

He also proposed spending \$10 million on the second war-head design competition. That money came from savings when the Nuclear Weapons Council decided to cancel the life-extension program for the W80 weapon, according to the report.

Domenici's bill must be hashed out with the House of Representatives and signed by the president before becoming law.

The program has revitalized the weapons-design community, said Tom D'Agostino, top official with the National Nuclear Security Administration, in congressional testimony earlier this year.

Two lab watchdog groups say the program is in part about money.

"The bomb production facilities in Los Alamos County, the richest county in the U.S.A., are gearing up to manufacture the atomic plutonium triggers for these new nuclear weapons," Jay Coghlan of Nuclear Watch New Mexico said in a statement. "(Reliable Replacement Warhead) is money in the bank for the (weapons of mass-destruction) millionaires up on the hill." Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group, based in Albuquerque, said the RRW "is the new face of the nuclear-weapons program, and it continues the arms race. And it's designed to replace all the weapons in the stockpile with new kinds of weapons, which is a lot of work. "The purpose of the Reliable Replacement Warhead is to provide fresh money and something to do for the weapons complex. ... The secondary purpose is to introduce novelty." Domenici's subcommittee also said it's important to pick a clear winner in the design competition. "The design teams at both Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and Los Alamos National Laboratory have worked extremely hard on their respective designs with the expectation that the best design would be selected," the subcommittee reported. "Any selection that isn't decided purely on merits would be a disservice to the Department of Defense, the RRW design teams and the (National Nuclear Security Administration.)" The director of Los Alamos National Laboratory said in a recent interview that the program is a study on whether the labs can make a warhead that's easier to manufacture and maintain as well as giving the government more confidence it will work without nuclear testing. "The issue is, is this actually a credible approach, technically," Anastasio said.

He also addressed questions about what it will mean if Los Alamos' design team wins the competition. "It's not about winning and losing. It's about doing the right thing for the country," Anastasio said.

Contact Andy Lenderman at 995-3827 or alenderman@sfnewmexican.com.

—;

LANL

Federal government looks to reduce oversight

The Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE — The federal government wants the management team for **Los Alamos** National Laboratory to have a more active role in identifying and correcting operational problems at the lab. **Los Alamos** National Security, LLC — which includes Bechtel Corp., BWX Technologies and Washington Group International and the University of California — took over the lab June 1. The National Nuclear Security Administration would set expectations and goals for the lab and hold the contractor responsible for meeting those goals safely under a new oversight model being developed by NNSA officials, said lab director Michael Anastasio. The NNSA will be more intrusive if goals aren't met, he said. "But if we do, then the goal is for (NNSA) to be less intrusive, so that we can use our expertise to figure out the best way to accomplish the goal of being safe and getting our mission work done on time," he said. Critics of the changes fear safety would suffer. Supporters contend the changes would reduce unnecessary paperwork and red tape that had been impeding work at

the nuclear-weapons laboratory. Such an arrangement could allow LANS to conceal safety and security problems and prevent negative publicity that might threaten its lucrative government contract, said Greg Mello, executive director of the **Los Alamos** Study Group, a lab watchdog organization. "It will be looked back on as a disaster," Mello said of the oversight system. "Why would you give to the contractor not only the responsibility for conducting the inspection but to write the criteria by which it's all evaluated?" Members of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Board, an independent federal safety board, also have been voicing concerns about reduced federal oversight at the lab. Board member C.H. Keilers Jr. expressed concern over the number of NNSA facilities representatives. The number of federal workers who check for environmental and security problems at the lab has declined from 18 to 12. Of those, only two are fully qualified, Keilers wrote in a June 9 report. NNSA officials acknowledge that resources and workers are being reassigned to work on the new oversight model.

LANL May Up Its Nuclear Production

Critics Protest Government Plans

BY JOHN ARNOLD *8/9/06*
Journal Staff Writer

LOS ALAMOS — Opponents of the National Nuclear Security Administration's plans to build more nuclear bomb cores at Los Alamos National Laboratory lined up Tuesday to blast the idea.

NNSA held the first of three public meetings to gather comments on a draft environmental evaluation, known as a sitewide environmental impact statement.

The voluminous document outlines potential environmental impacts from lab operations over the next five years. The evaluation covers a wide range of nuclear and non-nuclear operations, but the most controversial includes NNSA's plan to ramp up the production of nuclear bomb triggers, known as pits.

Critics on Tuesday said the proposal undermines international nonproliferation efforts, and they questioned how the lab would handle increased waste.

"Currently, we don't have adequate and safe plans to dispose of waste we have already produced," Albuquerque pastor Daniel Erdman said.

Currently, the lab is cleared to manufacture up to 20 pits a year. NNSA wants to increase production to 50 certified pits a year.

Because not all manufactured pits meet certification requirements, NNSA is requesting that LANL be allowed to make up to 80 a year, according to the environmental evaluation.

The plan will "dramatically



BROOKS:
NNSA chief has final say on nuclear alternatives

change the nature of Los Alamos National Laboratory's mission," according to Greg Mello of the Albuquerque-based Los Alamos Study Group. "Science at Los Alamos is an endangered species."

NNSA officials said they will incorporate public comments into a final version of the environmental impact statement, which will be sent to agency chief Linton Brooks for review.

The final document will offer several alternatives for how LANL should operate in the future. NNSA is recommending expanded operation including pit production. But the environmental evaluation will also include a "no-action" alternative and one for reduced operations.

Brooks will make a final decision on which alternatives the lab will pursue.

Speakers on Tuesday criticized the process as rushed, and they said the public's views should weigh heavily in the decision.

"It's not Linton Brooks, but the

Critics said the proposal undermines international nonproliferation efforts, and they questioned how the lab would handle increased waste.

people of this country who should be making this decision," said Astrid Webster of Albuquerque.

Two more public meetings are scheduled for this week, including one tonight at Northern New Mexico College in Española. Another meeting is scheduled for Thursday at Santa Fe Community College. Both meetings start at 6 p.m.

NNSA officials will also be collecting written comments through Sept. 20.

Public can weigh in on lab's future

By **Andy Lenderman**
The New Mexican

New buildings, environmental cleanup and more plutonium-pit production for nuclear weapons are possibilities for Los Alamos National Laboratory in the near future

The National Nuclear Security Administration, which oversees the nuclear weapons lab and is responsible for the country's nuclear weapons stockpile, is holding meetings and gathering comments on these and other ideas included in a draft environmental impact statement for the lab.

There's a public meeting tonight in Española and one

Thursday in Santa Fe where citizens can log their comments.

Pit production has caught the attention of the nuclear watchdog community. Pits are triggers for nuclear warheads.

In the impact statement, under what's called the preferred alternative, the lab could go from making up to 20 pits per year to 80. Of those, 50 would be certified for use in the weapons stockpile.

"We do have an interim pit production mission here at the lab," NNSA spokesman Bernie Pleau said. "... But it's nowhere near the capacity of Rocky

See **FUTURE**, Page C-5

IF YOU GO

Two public meetings include:

◆ 6-8:30 p.m. tonight in Española at Northern New Mexico Community College, Eagle Memorial Sportsplex, 921 Paseo de Oñate.

◆ 6-8:30 p.m. Thursday in Santa Fe at Santa Fe Community College, Main Building, Jemez Rooms, 6401 Richards Ave.

Written comments should be sent to Elizabeth Withers at lanl_sweis@doeal.gov, or NNSA Los Alamos Site Office, 528 35th St., Los Alamos, NM, 87544-2201. They can also be faxed to (505) 667-5948.

To place comments by phone, call (877) 491-4957, a toll free number.

part II, Wed. Aug. 9th

Future: LANL waste could increase

Continued from Page C-1

(Flats). And it's never going to get to that capacity that we can see right now. And it's based on the needs of the stockpile."

Pits were produced at the Department of Energy's Rocky Flats weapons complex during the Cold War. Nuclear-watchdog groups in New Mexico are concerned that environmental contamination could accompany a potential increase in pit production here.

"Los Alamos lab is the largest institution in Northern New Mexico," Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group said. "... And the character of the laboratory is going to change under these plans. And the laboratory will become a manufacturing center for a new generation of nuclear weapons."

Everything from the region's identity to property values could be affected, Mello said. "We can be assured that accidents will happen," he said. "We just don't know how severe they'll be."

Also in the draft statement, the amount of transuranic nuclear waste generated at Los Alamos could rise to 510 cubic yards a year from 260 cubic yards a year.

Much of that new waste will be collected during environmental cleanup, said Elizabeth Withers, an NNSA official. Specifically, she said, the waste could come from three areas, including the potential for more pit production.

The other two areas include:

◆ Replacing old buildings with new ones, which depends on Congressional funding. There are proposals to replace a radioactive liquid-waste-treatment facility; build a new science complex; remodel the plutonium facility and replace a warehouse and truck-inspection station, among other projects, Withers said.

"Most of the building up here took place in the '50s," Withers said.

◆ Cleaning up 12 major waste disposal areas.

Ultimately, NASA Administrator Linton Brooks will determine the lab's direction, and he can pick and choose among the various options in the impact statement, Withers said.

Contact **Andy Lenderman**
at 995-3827 or
alenderman@sfnewmexican.com.

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Los Alamos Monitor

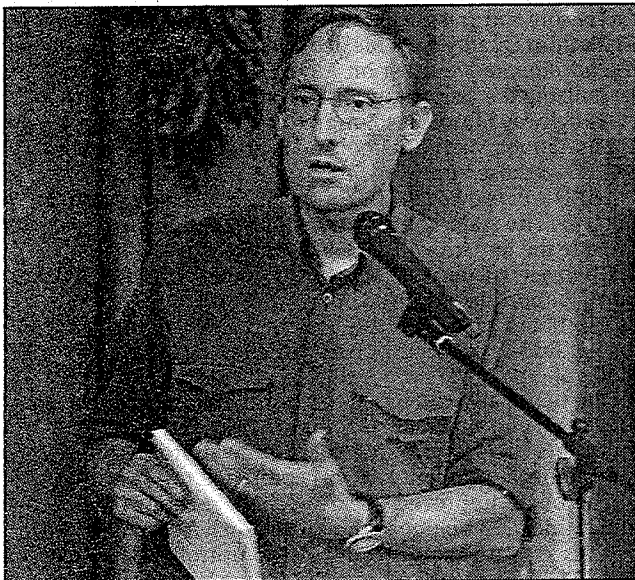
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1 Section, 8 Pages

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Lab folks mum on pit production



GARY WARREN/Monitor

EXPERT Greg Mello, executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group, speaks of the changing direction of work at Los Alamos National Laboratory during a Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement public hearing at Fuller Lodge on Tuesday evening.

ROGER SNODGRASS
roger@lamonitor.com
Monitor Assistant Editor

It was 18-0 Tuesday night, as the first of at least three public meetings about the relative environmental impacts of various development scenarios at Los Alamos National Laboratory came to a lopsided end.

The subject was the Draft Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement for Continued Operations. The first opportunity for public comment took place in Los Alamos, but no current laboratory employees offered comment one way or the other.

Other venues including written comments are available.

Opposition to the National

Nuclear Security Administration's "expanded operations alternative," - and particularly the expansion of nuclear weapon activities and additional waste production - dominated the two-hour environmental impact "slam" at Fuller Lodge.

Elizabeth Winters, the Department of Energy compliance officer for the National Environmental Program Act at Los Alamos, introduced the four-volume document, asking for public input on the statement so that "the best possible decision" could be made.

She said the comment period had just been extended an extra 15 days, from Sept. 5 to Sept. 20, a decision that was made Tuesday.

Several speakers, including Erich Kuerschner of Taos, complained that copies of the draft document were not readily available. Chris Mechels of Tesuque objected to the lack of availability of supporting assessments cited in the draft document.

Many speakers were from neighboring communities; some came from out of state. Their commentaries ranged from moral thrashing to substantive critiques about the public review process and scientific issues at stake in the three main baskets of proposals for the next five years at the laboratory - no action, reduced activities and expanded activities.

Topping the publicly expressed concerns was the

rapid expansion of pit production. Pits are the plutonium primaries that initiate a thermonuclear explosion and LANL is the only place in the country where a few handfuls are still being made. The expansion plan calls for quadrupling production plans from about 20 to about 80 pits.

Greg Mello, executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group, said that a decision to quadruple the pit production would dramatically change the laboratory, and he didn't think people in Los Alamos yet realized what that would mean.

Jodi Benson of Los Alamos, among others, made the

See **SESSION**, 2

Critics dominate environmental meetings

ROGER SNODGRASS
 roger@lamonitor.com
 Monitor Assistant Editor

8-11-06

SANTA FE – The public meetings on future environmental impacts at Los Alamos National Laboratory ended as they began – with even more criticism of expanding nuclear weapons production and hazardous waste generation.

Local officials of the National Nuclear Security Administration again faced a barrage of anger and recrimination Thursday night, in which members of the public repeated many of the same themes from the first meeting in Los Alamos on Tuesday.

“We are following a process that is set down by policy,” Bernie Pleau, NNSA spokesman, said this morning. “NEPA is a requirement of the law. We asked people to come in and give their comments. That’s what they did. They expressed their opinions and emotions,” he said. “We’ll look at what was said and what was recorded and incorporate into the document those comments that add value.”

So many people were signed up to speak against the Draft Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement Thursday night at Santa Fe Community College that the meeting facilitators limited speaking time to three minutes, rather than the five minutes



GARY WARREN/Monitor

IN ATTENDANCE The third public meeting on the Draft Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement for Continued Operations at LANL was held Thursday evening in Santa Fe. Photos are from a meeting Tuesday evening at Fuller Lodge in which Elizabeth Winters, DOE compliance officer for the National Environmental Program Act at Los Alamos, is seen speaking to attendees. Ed Wilmot, Los Alamos Site Office manager for NNSA, is shown as he listens.

given to people at the other venues.

This became a point of contention, as many of the speakers complained that they were prepared to speak for five minutes, as others had done during the hearings.

“I was surprised that not one sin-

gle person stood up to defend pit production, or even the existence of US nuclear deterrent – and NNSA did not presume to defend it either,” said Greg Mello this morning, after attending all three nights, including the public meeting in Española on

Wednesday. Mello is the executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group who has tracked the laboratory’s processes for nearly two decades. “At the Modern Pit Facility hearings, NNSA officials did attempt to justify the mission and need,” Mello continued. “Here, no one stood up to defend the program.”

He said only the lab’s scientists were spoken of favorably, mostly by people who thought they should be employed more constructively.

A few members of the audience began to act out during the first 15 minutes of the meeting when the project’s document manager Elizabeth Winters first mentioned the possibility of increased production of nuclear pits. Others used the meeting as a forum for political recruiting.

Since closure of the Department of Energy’s Rocky Flats facility in 1989, production of plutonium triggers for nuclear weapons has shifted to LANL, where an emergency capability has been established.

That role could expand dramatically, if the expanded operations alternative calling for an annual production rate of up to 80 pits is chosen by NNSA Administrator Linton Brooks.

The no-action alternative would continue the current ceiling of 20 pits

See **MEETING**, 3

From Page 1

per year, approved in a 1999 decision.

Santa Fe City Councilor Matthew Ortiz led off the meeting by reading a resolution co-sponsored by all but one of the members of the nine-person city council, objecting to the proposed expanded nuclear weapons activities alternatives in the

draft document.

The resolution, expected to pass at the governing body’s meeting at the end of the month, called for an extension of the comment period, as did many individuals during the course of the evening.

Responding to earlier complaints that references

cited in the Draft SWEIS were not available at public locations, NNSA issued a paper listing three locations where they can be obtained – at the Northern New Mexico Citizens Advisory Board office in Santa Fe; at the Government Information Department of Zimmerman Library, UNM, in Albu-

querque; and at the LANL Public Reading Room in Los Alamos.

Jay Coghlan of Nuke-Watch New Mexico said his organization would put nine CDs of the referenced information on its website (<http://www.nukewatch.org>) next week, to make it more accessible.

SESSION Pit production discussed

From Page 1

implication explicit.

"This is going to specifically change the direction of Los Alamos, moving it from science to production," she said, sharing a view she had heard expressed in the community.

In the past, LANL officials have expressed little interest in assuming a major pit production role at the weapons laboratory.

A handful of speakers from Los Alamos, such as Ed Grothus, were either retired or not directly employed by the laboratory.

Chuck Pergler, an environmental consultant for a company with laboratory contracts, said new pit production might not even be necessary and that studies about pit longevity in the existing weapons stockpile should be studied, "before we spend a billion dollars" on this kind of expansion.

He was one of several speakers who objected to removing the discussion of where to locate the Modern Pit Facility from the national agenda, and making it into a local issue, despite having

important environmental consequences for many other communities around the country.

In an overview of the NEPA process, Withers explained that NNSA Administrator Linton Brooks would make the final decisions about the level of operations at Los Alamos and which actions would be taken.

Several decisions, formalized as Records of Decision, are expected, as a result of the NEPA process.

Withers said she anticipated that one decision would be an affirmation of a commitment to meet the court-ordered compliance agreement with the state, concerning the ongoing comprehensive environmental clean-up program at the laboratory.

She compared the decision-making process to voting, noting that Brooks could choose one or another of the alternatives, like voting "a straight party ticket" or he could pick individual actions from one alternative to go with parts of another, as in voting across party lines.

Other new projects that would add new or expand existing capabilities include several new buildings and building complexes - the four-building, 700,000-square-foot Center for Weapons Research to consolidate the stockpile stewardship program in the main administrative area; the 400,000-square-foot science complex; and the 10-building, 400,000-square-foot Radiological Sciences Institute, a replacement for the 57-year-old radiography facility at Technical Area 8.

Expanded computer operations at the Metropolis Center for Modeling and Simulation would contribute to an overall 40-percent increase in electrical requirement to 668,000 megawatt-hours and an additional one-third water usage, to 522 million gallons.

The Radioactive Liquid Waste Treatment Facility would be modernized to manage the disposition of about 66 percent more transuranic waste and 25 percent more low-level radioactive waste under an expanded

operation option.

A "reduced operations alternative" includes 20-percent reductions in high explosive processing and testing, and shutting down the Los Alamos Neutron Science Center (LANSCE), maintaining the system for a possible future restart.

Regina Wheeler, Solid Waste Division manager for Los Alamos County said the county is reviewing the document and would be submitting written comments.

The public comment meetings continue tonight in Eagles Memorial Sportsplex at Northern New Mexico Community College in Española and in the Main Building at Santa Fe Community College in Santa Fe. Both meetings will begin with a poster session beginning at 6 p.m., NNSA presentations at 6:30 p.m.; and public comment beginning at 6:45 p.m.

More information: E-mail: LANL_SWEIS@DOEAL.GOV or call LASO EIS hotline at (toll free) 1-877-491-4957.

MEETING

From Page 1

said. "I would prefer we maintain ownership and continue to lead it to UNM-LA."

During the board's regular meeting held in the district boardroom Tuesday, the board also voted 5-0 to review the district's vision and mission statements.

"The administrative team will lay out a plan for revitalizing the vision and mission statements," Janecky said. "Brenda Clark from Quality New Mexico will conduct a workshop for the administrative team on Aug. 23 when they will look at revitalizing the vision and mission statements."

A Highway Funds Resolution to resurface the parking lots at Los Alamos Middle School and Barranca Mesa Elementary School was also approved 5-0.

LAPD will provide \$8,116 of the \$32,467 project cost or 25 percent. The state, through a matching funds program, will provide the remaining \$24,359 or 75 percent.

Changes to policies 3545-transportation and 4081-parent participation also received board approval.

The board discussed the pros and cons of random drug testing during extra curricular activities. A decision was not made.

The board also discussed the fact that enrollment at both Mountain and Aspen are down from last year.

Aspen's current enrollment is 267, down from 325 last fall. Mountain's enrollment is at 424 compared to 441 last spring.

The board approved back-to-school meetings and dates and ratification of June and July cash disbursements.

Janecky introduced new LAPS Comptroller Sean Trujillo and LAMS new assistant principal Mike Johnson who previously taught history at LAMS.

The next school board meeting and work session will be held Aug. 24 in the district boardroom. The public is invited to attend.

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Public can weigh in on lab's future

By Andy Lenderman

The New Mexican

New buildings, environmental cleanup and more plutonium-pit production for nuclear weapons are possibilities for **Los Alamos** National Laboratory in the near future. The National Nuclear Security Administration, which oversees the nuclear weapons lab and is responsible for the country's nuclear weapons stockpile, is holding meetings and gathering comments on these and other ideas included in a draft environmental impact statement for the lab. There's a public meeting tonight in Española and one

Thursday in Santa Fe where citizens can log their comments. Pit production has caught the attention of the nuclear watchdog community. Pits are triggers for nuclear warheads. In the impact statement, under what's called the preferred alternative, the lab could go from making up to 20 pits per year to 80. Of those, 50 would be certified for use in the weapons stockpile. "We do have an interim pit production mission here at the lab," NNSA spokesman Bernie Pleau said. "... But it's nowhere near the capacity of Rocky

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Future: LANL waste could increase

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(Flats). And it's never going to get to that capacity that we can see right now. And it's based on the needs of the stockpile." Pits were produced at the Department of Energy's Rocky Flats weapons complex during the Cold War. Nuclear-watch-dog groups in New Mexico are concerned that environmental contamination could accompany a potential increase in pit production here.

"Los Alamos lab is the largest institution in Northern New Mexico," Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group said. "... And the character of the laboratory is going to change under these plans. And the laboratory will become a manufacturing center for a new generation of nuclear weapons." Everything from the region's identity to property values could be affected, Mello said. "We can be assured that accidents will happen," he said. "We just don't know how severe they'll be." Also in the draft statement, the amount of transuranic nuclear waste generated at Los Alamos could rise to 510 cubic yards a year from 260 cubic yards a year.

Much of that new waste will be collected during environmental cleanup, said Elizabeth Withers, an NNSA official. Specifically, she said, the waste could come from three areas, including the potential for more pit production. The other two areas include: replacing old buildings with new ones, which depends on Congressional funding. There are proposals to replace a radioactive liquid-waste-treatment facility; build a new science complex; remodel the plutonium facility and replace a warehouse and truck-inspection station, among other projects, Withers said. "Most of the building up here took place in the '50s," Withers said. Cleaning up 12 major waste disposal areas. Ultimately, NASA Administrator Linton Brooks will determine the lab's direction, and he can pick and choose among the various options in the impact

statement, Withers said.

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InBrief

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Nuclear bomb work triggers opposition

LOS ALAMOS — A proposal by the federal government for Los Alamos National Laboratory to quadruple its production of triggers for nuclear weapons has met opposition from watchdog groups.

The National Nuclear Security Administration, which oversees the nation's nuclear weapons stockpile, proposes Los Alamos increase its production of plutonium pits from 20 a year to 80.

"We can be assured that accidents will happen," said Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group. "We just don't know how severe they'll be."

He said the proposal will change the character of the laboratory, making it "a manufacturing center for a new generation of nuclear weapons" that could affect everything from the identity of northern New Mexico to property values.