Sunday, September 3, 2006

Nukes Bring Everyone Down

By Willem Malten

The Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement for the new mission at Los Alamos National Laboratory, which will effectively transform the lab into a nuclear bomb factory, talks about how to handle and clean up all the waste and contamination that will be generated— as if Los Alamos has had a spotless record in this regard thus far. I am not going to read it— it is a macabre sideshow, like talking about reducing the smoke from the ovens of Auschwitz.

The environment I am concerned with— never even mentioned in the SWEIS— is the psychic environment that goes together with the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction.

I am concerned about the international environment that is created by trashing treaties such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Isn't our complicity and bad faith the reason that people all over the world see us as enemies? Isn't that the motivation behind proliferation of nuclear weapons in poor, backward places like Iran and North Korea? If the country with the largest conventional army needs nuclear weapons, don't we all?

I am concerned about how to control a privatized corporate nuclear weapon industry, now that the contract for Los Alamos' WMD factory has gone to Bechtel and the University of California. Don't corporations work to maximize profit for their shareholders— in this case, fomenting conflict all over so that there is a lively market for their product? What about congressional or regulatory oversight in this scenario? This concern is not farfetched: remember, the FBI had to fly in with helicopters in order to shut down Rocky Flats.

Declaring war on ill-defined concepts such as "terror" or "drugs" involves the prospect of endless wars without any measure of victory, and a totally arbitrary distinction between "the good guys" and "the bad guys." The only winners are the corporations that make the weapons, giving them an interest in privatizing conflict, and managing the public's perception through the media.

When more than 80 percent of the American public has expressed a desire for nuclear disarmament, yet the national laboratories such as the ones in New Mexico keep pursuing renewed testing, upgrading nuclear weapons and building a new pit production facility, there is something seriously wrong. The sheer magnitude of nuclear weapons and everything that comes with it— research, production, contamination, security— is incompatible with a functioning democracy.

Democracy may have to be rebuilt from the bottom up. Neighborhoods, communities and cities are now the vehicles that express the people's will and have to represent the changes we are seeking. True security and democracy comes from a stronger sense of community, from getting closer. That is why it is significant that Santa Fe has adopted a second resolution against pit production in Los Alamos and in favor of strengthening the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and other disarmament treaties. Being a city of peace and holy faith at this point means to resist the WMD facility called LANL on a mesa nearby.

The people of the world are watching and wondering if "We the People" are up to the task. Let's take courage. It started here; let's stop it here.

Malten is a baker, filmmaker and community activist in Santa Fe, as well as a longtime member of the Los Alamos Study Group.

truthout
WEDNESDAY 28 MARCH 2012

Willem Malten | Los Alamos Environmental Impact

Los Alamos Environmental Impact

By Willem Malten

t r u t h o u t | Perspective

Wednesday 06 September 2006

When over 80% of the American public has expressed a desire for mutual nuclear disarmament and still the US nuclear labs (Los Alamos and Sandia in New Mexico and Lawrence Livermore in California) keep pursuing nuclear weapons upgrades - and now a new plutonium warhead core ("pit") factory - there is something seriously wrong. The sheer magnitude of nuclear weapons and everything that comes with them - the research and testing, the production, the contamination, the ever-increasing security - is simply incompatible with a functioning democracy. Now that democracy may have to be rebuilt from the bottom up.

The latest nuclear insult to democracy, common sense and morality is described in a document called the "Draft Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement," or SWEIS for short, for the operation of Los Alamos National Laboratory. In it, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), an autonomous fiefdom within the Department of Energy (DOE), describes the first 5 years of its plan to turn Los Alamos into a nuclear bomb factory.

Few details of this plan are provided, despite nearly 2,000 pages of text. In sum, the SWEIS says Los Alamos will be making 80 new plutonium pits per year by 2012. Allowing for defective pits and pits

needed for testing, NNSA expects to be building 50 brand-new nuclear weapons per year by that date, pits being the limiting factor in the whole nuclear bomb-making business. After 2012, production is expected to ramp up to 200 pits per year or even more. Billions of dollars in new construction funds are planned.

Pits are hollow shells of fissile material, usually plutonium, and other metals. When surrounded by high explosives, they make an atomic bomb. In a thermonuclear weapon, this first (or "primary") fission stage ignites a second stage (the "secondary").

The SWEIS purports to examine the environmental impact of the waste and contamination that will be generated in pit manufacture - as if Los Alamos could be trusted in this regard, and as if writing a big book about the problem somehow fixed it. In reality, the SWEIS is a bit of a macabre sideshow, with multiple levels of absurdity, like talking - and just talking, mind you - about reducing the smoke from the ovens of Auschwitz.

Much more than just environmental impact is at issue here. What's not mentioned in the SWEIS is the psychic environment that goes hand in hand with the manufacturing of Weapons of Mass Destruction - that is, the denial of any sort of future for our children and what that disturbing realization does to them. Is it a coincidence that New Mexico has among the very highest rates of juvenile suicide of any state?

We should be equally concerned about the international "environment" created by trashing treaties like the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). It is our own complicity in the nuclear build-up, this bad faith, that gives people all over the world reason to see us as enemies. If the world's largest conventional army needs nuclear weapons, doesn't every country?

And what about moral contamination? Nuclear weapons help condemn most of humanity to live in a perpetual state of fear, slavishly following a global master elite, being brainwashed to accept the propaganda slurry that masquerades as education or news.

What about the commercial "environment?" How are we going to control a privatized corporate nuclear-weapon industry, especially now that the contract for Los Alamos' Weapons of Mass Destruction

Factory has gone to Bechtel and its cronies. Corporations work to maximize profits for their shareholders, in this case fomenting global conflict to support a lively market for their "product." We need more Congressional and regulatory oversight, not less. Concern about rogue contractors is not farfetched: remember, the FBI had to raid Rocky Flats Plant to shut it down.

The vision behind making new pits is a combined nightmare of Fascism and Hibakusha. The threshold of Fascism is crossed when spying and fear become tools of control, when torture is condoned and when civilian targets become commonplace. Originally, the term Hibakusha referred to the survivors of the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Most of the Hibakusha, even those who at some point were able to function again in some semblance of normalcy, are marked by scars that will never heal from the torture that was perpetrated on them in one single flash of human madness.

The Hibakusha phenomenon has been spreading over the whole world since 1945. Now we have Hibakusha in the Bikini Atoll, in Australia, in Kosovo, Afghanistan and in Iraq. We have Hibakusha in the Ukraine, and Belarus. We have Hibakusha here in America itself like the Shoshone Nation (the most bombed nation on earth) in Nevada, or here in our backyard, New Mexico, we have Hibakusha in Laguna, Acoma, in Grants, in Navajo, and in Espanola. If it were up to corporations like Bechtel, BWTX, Lockheed Martin, the Washington Group, plus the University of California, we soon would all be Hibakusha.

Declaring war on ill-defined concepts like "terror" or "drugs" involves the prospect of endless wars, without any measure of victory and with a totally arbitrary distinction between the "good guys" and the "bad guys." The only winners are the corporations that make the weapons, which gives them an interest in "privatizing conflict" and in managing the public perception by media control. In a world where most of the money is spent on weapons, most of the problems start looking like military problems and most of the solutions look military as well.

We need to understand the bankruptcy this has wreaked on civil society. This blind militarism is the cause for proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear bombs, worldwide. Nuclear weapons are the very spear point of this culture of violence - the ultimate failure of diplomacy - highlighting our inability to talk with each other as humans among humans. People have to understand

that the Fallujahs of our time are just a prelude to the use of nuclear devices. These weapons are not just aimed at the people of the world, they are not just taking away the resources of the next generations - these weapons are aimed at the heart of human dignity. Yet our whole foreign policy rests on the fear that these weapons instill. They provide a kind of "civilized terrorism" as a tool for the commander in chief.

Neighborhoods, communities and cities are now the vehicles that express the people's will and have to represent the changes we are seeking. True security and democracy comes from a stronger sense of community, from getting closer. This is why it is significant that Santa Fe adopted a second resolution against pit production in Los Alamos and in favor of strengthening the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and other disarmament treaties. Being a City of Peace and Holy Faith (Santa Fe) at this point means we must resist the Weapons of Mass Destruction Facility called LANL on a mesa nearby. The people of the world are watching and wondering if We the People are up to the task. Brothers and sisters, let's take courage: It started here, let's stop it here.

For More Information:

Los Alamos Study Group: http://www.lasg.org/

http://www.lasg.org/campaigns/PUPitProd.htm

http://www.lasg.org/NNSAPrivatization.pdf

Willem Malten is a baker, filmmaker and community activist in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He owns and runs Cloud Cliff Bakery, Cafe and Artspace in Santa Fe. As a baker, he is active in supporting the re-emergence of native and organic wheat farming in New Mexico. Together with Amy Goodman, Martin Sheen, Greg Mello, Corbin Harney and others, Willem Malten directed "Cry at the End of the 20th Century," a documentary about the role of Los Alamos and civil disobedience. Recently he has been filming and researching the Shipibo people in the Peruvian Amazon rainforest. He has a masters in

anthropology from his native Netherlands. He is a long term member of the Los Alamos Study Group (lasg.org) under the guidance of Greg Mello and writes an occasional blog called "Shaman Politics."

Additional research for this article was provided by Greg Mellow.

WEAPONS TESTING

Domenici says N.M. site could host blast

Controversial bomb's explosion at White Sands would be non-nuclear

9/12/06

By Steve Terrell
The New Mexican

A test of a powerful new bomb that has aroused intense public opposition in other states might be in the works for New Mexico, U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici said Monday.

The federal Defense Threat Reduction Agency could be considering testing the "bunker-busting" weapon known as Divine Strake at White Sands Missile Range, Domenici, R-N.M., told radio reporters. "To my knowledge, this is the principal site and the only site being considered, but don't hold me to that," Domenici said.

Pete Domenici
Senator says, "To my knowledge, this is the principal site and the only site being considered."

The senator stressed this would be a "non-nuclear test of bunker-busting technology." He said some critics have "without propriety" related the Divine Strake with nuclear testing.

Divine Strake involves detonating 700 tons of explosive ammonium-nitrate fuel oil.

Greg Mello, executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group, said Monday that his group is opposed to any test of the bomb in New Mexico. He said besides environmental concerns, his

Please see **BLAST,** Page A-4

Blast: Has been protested in Utah, Indiana

Continued from Page A-1

organization is concerned the Divine Strake is a precursor of low-yield nuclear earth-penetrating attack weapons.

A spokeswoman for Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., said to conduct such a test, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency would first have to conduct an environmental impact study, which involves a public process. "What the senator has said is if there is any attempt to short-circuit this process, he would oppose it legislatively," Jude McCartin said.

McCartin said she thinks the agency still wants to conduct the test at the original site in Nevada, above a tunnel about 65 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

Later news reports said the agency was considering testing the Divine Strake at a limestone quarry in southern Indiana, about 30 miles south of Bloomington. Following a public outcry, however, the agency said there were no such plans.

The test would create a dust cloud that could reach an altitude of 10,000 feet, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency has said.

Some critics have worried the bomb would disperse radioactive material from previous nuclear tests.

The first atomic bomb was tested in 1945 at Trinity Site in New Mexico, which is now part of White Sands.

Among the opponents of the Nevada plans were many Utah residents who feared environmental damage from a test in the neighboring state.

Among the opponents there was U.S. Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, who wrote an opinion piece in the *Spectrum* newspaper in St. George, Utah, that concluded: "The bottom line is this — I oppose any kind of testing anywhere that will have a detrimental effect on human life. We still have no assurance that Divine Strake can be conducted safely."

Contact Steve Terrell at 986-3037 or sterrell@sfnewmexican.com.

White Sands may host bunker-buster bomb test

p. A-1 9/14/06

By Sue Vorenberg
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White Sands Missile Range is on a short list of places that the Defense Threat Reduction Agency will consider for new bunker-buster bomb test, said a spokesman for Sen. Pete Domenici, an Albuquerque Republican.

The bomb, dubbed Divine Strake, will have 700 tons of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil equal to about 560 tons of TNT.

A *strake* is a piece of hull planking on a ship.

The goal of the test, planned since 2002, is to predict damage to deep underground facilities.

The blast will happen on ground over a test tunnel so scientists can determine how much underground shock it causes, said Irene Smith, an agency spokeswoman.

The bomb will not use any nuclear components. Any actual weapon developed with data from the test should not be nuclear, said Chris Gallegos, the Domenici spokesman.

"They're not even supposed to be studying nuclear bunker-busters," Gallegos said.

Please see **TEST/A6**

TEST *from A1*

"This would be a conventional weapon."

Local environmental groups aren't so sure about that, said Greg Mello, executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group, an anti-nuclear weapons group.

"This is a test to develop and demonstrate a low-yield, nuclear, Earth-penetrating weapon," Mello said. "This is a weapon the U.S. does not need and it will send a very dangerous signal to the world."

In 2005, Domenici, chairman of the Senate Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee, led a Senate group that removed funding from the 2006 budget for nuclear bunker-buster tests, Gallegos said.

The idea was that agency should focus more on conventional bunker-buster-type weapons, such as this one, Gallegos said.

But Mello is worried that the upcoming test could eventually pave the way for a nuclear bunker-buster.

"All they need is for the president to say 'make it,'" Mello said.

The experiment was originally slated for the Nevada Test Site earlier this year.

In May, the Nevada Site Office and National Nuclear Security Administration delayed the test because of environmental concerns, Smith said.

"That action was based on NNSA/NSO's decision to clarify and provide further information on the impacts, if any, of background radiation on the Divine Strake site," Smith said in an e-mail.

The agency has been investigating the environmental concerns and is still considering conducting the test in Nevada as well as "other possible sites," Smith said.

"The earliest the experiment could be conducted would be several months into calendar year 2007," she said.

White Sands hasn't conducted above-ground explosives tests like this one since the early 1990s, when the agency built the Large Blast-Thermal Simulator on the site, said Jim Eckles, a spokesman.

The simulator is an underground tunnel that scientists can use to re-create the shock waves and heat of a nuclear blast without radiation, Eckles said.

The biggest test blast at White Sands when it was testing above-ground explosives was in the mid-1980s.

It consisted of 4,700 tons of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil — about seven times larger than the Divine Strake test, Eckles said.

Ammonium nitrate is readily available as fertilizer. A mixture of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil was used in the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, he said.

DTRA has conducted tests at White Sands "for decades," Eckles added.

Mello said he's not overly concerned about ground contamination, but he is concerned about air quality issues that could arise with a new above-ground test in New Mexico.

White Sands might not have the proper permits to conduct the test, as regulations might have changed since the 1990s, he added.

"To me, it remains an open question," Mello said.

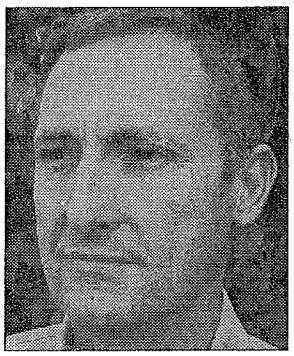
Smith referred the question to Eckles at White Sands, but Eckles isn't sure about air quality permits either.

It is too soon to tell because DTRA hasn't reached a final decision on where and if it will conduct the experiment, he said.

"I doubt if our environmental office would have an answer without seeing proposed details of the test," Eckles said.

Pit production: once begun, hard to control

GUEST COLUMNIST 9/14/06 Monitor



Greg Mello

In late 2007 Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) is slated to begin production of plutonium warhead cores ("pits") for the U.S. stockpile. If this occurs I believe it will the first time LANL has made pits for the stockpile since 1949 and it will be the first time the U.S. has produced new stockpile pits since 1989.

Producing pits for the stockpile has a number of serious implications for the lab, the town, and the country. Before discussing these, I would like to lay out some of what is publicly known about possible future pit production at LANL.

According to National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) budget submittals and the LANL draft site-wide environmental impact statement (SWEIS), the rate of pit production, now zero, is supposed to reach between 30 and 50 stockpile pits/year by 2012 if not before, or up to 80 pits/year including test pits and rejects.

The first pits to be made are for W88 475-kiloton submarine-launched warheads, to be made at a rate of 10 per year. Congressional budget submittals indicate that a total of 70 W88s are to be produced between early FY2008 and FY2014.

In addition, by 2012 if not well before (conflicting accounts are given) pits for at least one version of the "Reliable Replacement Warhead" (RRW) are slated to begin production.

According to NNSA chief Linton Brooks, RRWs are supposed to replace all the pits in the stockpile, expected to number about 6,000 in 2012. The first weapons to be replaced are the two Trident warheads, the W76 and W88.

The W76 is now in the beginning stages of a $2.5 billion upgrade, expected to extend its life for another 30 years. (This also happens to be the expected life of the RRW. Go figure.)

What will happen after 2012, the end of the SWEIS analysis period?

That depends on decisions made between now and then. One of the most crucial decisions is now pending before the Energy and Water Appropriations Conference Committee, namely whether to continue funding for the proposed Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) building.

The CMRR is a $1 billion, 400,000 square-foot facility that would provide pit production support at TA-55, among secondary purposes.

The House Appropriations Committee, led in this matter by David Hobson (R-OH), believes the CMRR is "irrational" and "absurd" and has proposed cutting all funding (last year) or nearly all funding (this year) for the project. Senator Domenici got the CMRR fully funded last year. This year's negotiations are still pending and it is unlikely that a decision will take place before the Nov. 7 elections.

How many pits might LANL make? Possibly all of them. Take a look at the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board (SEAB) report on the future of the nuclear weapons complex.

The SEAB, while generally endorsing the concept of a "Consolidated Nuclear Production Center" (CNPC) that would integrate all major nuclear activities at a single site, also advised that LANL's main plutonium building (PF-4) could produce 20 times as many pits per year as it now does. Depending on how one interprets this, PF-4's alleged potential production appears to be in the range of 200-400 pits/year.

NNSA's most recent admitted plan for large-scale pit production was the so-called Modern Pit Facility (MPF), a roughly $4 billion project capable of making 125-450 pits/year, originally to come on line circa 2020. LANL was the preferred site for the MPF from the technical perspective.

NNSA, having failed to sell this plan, now requests no funding for the MPF through at least 2011. Instead, the "realignment of prior Modern Pit Facility funding starting in FY 2007 will support NNSA planning to increase pit manufacturing capacity at LANL."

Looking at total pit-manufacturing sunk costs at LANL since 1995, DOE and NNSA have already spent about $2.5 billion in 2006 dollars laying the groundwork for pit production at LANL. A decade from now, NNSA (assuming its requests are funded), will have spent a few more billions of dollars on pit production at LANL (the exact number depending on what you want to count).

So 10 years from now, if all goes according to published plans, funds comparable in size and purpose to those anticipated for the MPF will have been spent at LANL and a production capacity comparable to the MPF will have been achieved.

How? NNSA plans to enable greater pit production capacity at LANL by a number of means. The first is new and refurbished facilities, centrally the CMRR, which is now in the early stages of design/build and is slated to begin operation in 2014.

In addition to the CMRR there is the "Plutonium Facility Complex Refurbishment Project," major security and transportation investments, expansion of the nuclear waste disposal area at TA-54, the "Radioactive Liquid Waste Treatment Facility Upgrade Project" in TA-50, and a TA-55 radiography facility, to pick only the most obvious.

Second, the Department of Energy (DOE) and NNSA hope to relocate plutonium-238 activities from PF-4 to the Idaho National Laboratory (INL), roughly doubling the floor space available to pit production in PF-4.

Third, the RRW will be designed for automated manufacture, with fewer "hands-on" steps, fewer hazardous materials, looser tolerances in key places, and fewer manufacturing steps and work stations overall.

These design changes, taken together and combined with other "agile" manufacturing innovations would enable, it is thought, much greater production rates.

Finally, reconfiguration of production equipment and relocation of stored material and light laboratory functions may liberate more PF-4 space and enable what is available to be used more efficiently for pit production.

If made, these investments will likely commit LANL to being the sole U.S. pit production facility. What other billions would be available for another?

Next time: the implications of pit production for the lab and the town.

Greg Mello is the director of the Los Alamos Study Group.

9-15-06

Bunker-Buster May Be Tested in N.M.

Environmentalists Wary of Explosive

By Charles D. Brunt
Journal Staff Writer

Environmental concerns with the Nevada Test Site are prompting the Defense Department to consider White Sands Missile Range as a test site for Divine Strake, a half-kiloton explosion aimed at determining its bunker-busting capabilities.

Although it is a non-nuclear explosion, the test has attracted criticism from anti-nuclear weapons groups. It is designed, at least in part, to give scientists an idea of what size nuclear bomb might be needed to obliterate underground installations.

White Sands' possible involvement came to light earlier this week when Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., told reporters he believes the southern New Mexico range "is the principal site" being considered by the Defense Department's Defense Threat Reduction Agency for the Divine Strake test.

The test involves the detonation of 700 tons of an explosive slurry of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil placed above an underground tunnel complex.

The blast would be equivalent to about a half-kiloton — about 400 times more powerful than the ammonia-nitrate/fuel oil bomb that destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City, but 20 times smaller than the nuclear bomb that leveled Hiroshima.

The test had initially been scheduled for June 2 at the Nevada Test Site. It has been postponed, however, by concerns over potential environmental impact, according to Irene Smith, a spokeswoman for DTRA based at Fort Belvoir, Va.

In May, the National Nuclear Security Administration withdrew its finding that the Nevada test would have "no significant impact" on the environment and is now re-evaluating that stance.

Lawsuits have been filed by civilians protesting the Nevada test.

"Considering the fact that there is a lot of opposition right now in Nevada to (using) the Nevada Test Site, as DTRA moves forward with an environmental assessment of that

See **FEDS** *on* **PAGE A2**

Friday, September 15, 2006

Feds May Test Bunker-Buster At White Sands

from **PAGE A1**

site, the military is actively looking at an alternative site, and that would primarily be White Sands," said Chris Gallegos, Domenici's press secretary.

He said any Divine Strake activity at White Sands will require completion of an environmental impact statement. He also said the earliest the test could be conducted would be several months into 2007.

Gallegos stressed the non-nuclear aspects of the test.

"We want to make it clear on this that, whether the Defense Department chooses to do this in Nevada or at White Sands, that it would absolutely be a non-nuclear test," Gallegos said.

"Some of the opponents keep bringing up the nuclear question, but that's not even an option right now," he said. "The United States does not do those kinds of tests anymore. Also, Congress (last year) cut off funding for all development of a nuclear bunker-buster weapon."

Although the Divine Strake test does not involve a nuclear explosion, Defense Department documents make it clear that it has nuclear implications.

The Defense Threat Reduction Agency's fiscal 2006 budget request included funding to conduct a "full-scale tunnel defeat demonstration using high explosives to simulate a low-yield nuclear weapon."

The budget request also says the test will "develop a planning tool that will improve the warfighter's confidence in selecting the smallest nuclear yield necessary to destroy underground facilities while minimizing collateral damage."

Some critics, including the anti-nuclear weapons Los Alamos Study Group, say Divine Strake is inseparable from nuclear weapons.

"Divine Strake is a terrible idea because it is meant to help develop nuclear earth-penetrating weapons, so-called bunker-busters, and optimize them for targets," said Greg Mello, executive director of the study group that opposes nuclear weapons.

Citing DTRA documents, Gallegos said the test is designed "to provide scientific data to support the improvement and validation of computer model planning tools that predict ground-shock environment and how tunnels respond to hard and deeply buried targets."

Mello also questioned whether sufficient attention is being given to the potential environmental impacts of the test on the New Mexico missile range.

"It's very difficult to find out information about this test, even environmental information, let alone program information," Mello said.

> ***"Some of the opponents keep bringing up the nuclear question, but that's not even an option right now."***
>
> CHRIS GALLEGOS, DOMENICI'S PRESS SECRETARY

LANL Writing Pink Slips for up to 600 Contractors

Airdate: Thu., 28 Sep. 2006

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By: Renée Blake

Between 400 and 600 contractors are expected to receive a pink slip from Los Alamos National Laboratory, possibly within only a couple of weeks' time.

Laboratory spokesman Kevin Roark says this change will not affect the mission of the laboratory, or the contracts it has in place.

Listen

How much money will these changes save the lab?

Listen

Los Alamos Study Group Director Greg Mello says these cuts may not affect the mission or the contracts, but they are necessary because of management changes and mission changes.

Listen

Mello says with the need for funds, he expects to see between 700 and a thousand jobs cut and more money moved out of science programs.

Los Alamos National Laboratory is now managed by Los Alamos National Security LLC. It is a corporation made up of the Bechtel Corporation, Washington Group International, BWX Technologies and the University of California. These companies manage other nuclear facilities for the Department of Energy.

Links:
http://www.lanl.gov/
http://www.lasg.org/

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LOS ALAMOS

Nuke lab evacuations cited in federal probe

Incidents point to safety concerns in plutonium handling

- Keay Davidson, Chronicle Science Writer
Thursday, September 28, 2006

Power and ventilation failures at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico forced a half-dozen evacuations over the past four months from a building where radioactive plutonium is handled, according to a federal investigator.

No one was hurt in the employee evacuations, which date back to June 1, but the incidents point to continuing concern about the handling of radioactive materials for nuclear bombs at the lab, which is jointly run by the University of California, Bechtel Corp. and a few industrial partners.

The investigator, in memos to the U.S. Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board that monitors the safety of nuclear weapons labs, said the problems with the ventilation system occurred in a building within a complex set aside to deal with plutonium and other nuclear waste. Failure of the ventilation system can be hazardous because of the potential that plutonium might be sucked out of secure labs and through the structure, and possibly into the outside environment.

In a separate inspection, the investigator noted that half the weapons lab's storage containers for fast-accumulating amounts of plutonium used in bomb "pits" -- the explosive cores of nuclear weapons -- are possibly substandard and could lead to further safety issues.

The amount of plutonium and other radioactive waste is growing to the point "where they impact both (lab) mission and safety, virtually ensuring failure unless addressed as a priority," the investigator wrote in an Aug. 25 memo.

"Half of (the lab's) 9,000 nuclear material containers are nonstandard and suspect," the memo said. The inspector did not detail exactly what kind of accident might be represented as a "failure," but he said building TA-55 where the nuclear waste is stored, is so jammed with plutonium that it "is now near its residue storage capacity, and is within six months of having to curtail pit operations unless (the storage problem) is resolved."

The two memos, the first one dated Aug. 18, were written by an investigator for the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, an official advisory agency to the U.S. Energy Department and its quasi-independent branch, the U.S. National Nuclear Security Administration. NNSA oversees the nation's nuclear weapons complex.

Kevin Roark, a Los Alamos spokesman, said the lab is moving to resolve some problems identified by the memos, while denying that some of them are even problems. He acknowledged the evacuations occurred -- he wasn't sure how often -- but said the ventilation systems continued to operate each time because a diesel emergency power system kicked into action. The evacuations were calm and orderly, no one was hurt, and no plutonium escaped during the incidents, he said.

Roark denied the memos' claim that half the lab's radioactive waste containers are "nonstandard and suspect."

Julianne Smith, a spokeswoman for the Nuclear Security Administration, made clear that "we expect (the UC-Bechtel partnership) to run the lab in the safest, most effective and cost-efficient way possible. Certainly safety is a top priority." If the lab management doesn't live up to its responsibilities, she added, "we'll hold them accountable -- there's financial and other ways to hold them accountable."

Greg ~~Miller~~ Mello, a leading activist and lab critic with the citizens Los Alamos Study Group, blames the crisis on the lab's rush to transform itself into the nation's central nuclear bomb-making factory: "They want to push this (bomb-making complex) through while President Bush is in office because it's a political window in which they can act."

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URL: http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2006/09/28/BAG3CLE5941.DTL

Friday, September 29, 2006

Lightning Prompted LANL Shutdowns

By John Arnold
Journal Staff Writer

Los Alamos National Laboratory officials blame lightning and external electrical problems for power failures that forced the lab to shut down part of its plutonium facility six times over the summer.

A federal safety investigator reported last month that power and ventilation problems led to evacuations at LANL's Technical Area-55, where the lab processes radioactive plutonium and produces nuclear bomb cores, or pits.

Lab spokesman Kevin Roark said Thursday that Technical Area-55's aging infrastructure, including its electrical system, are in need of upgrades but aren't responsible for this summer's power failures.

"There's an electrical line that comes off of the grid into the lab, and sometimes it goes out, especially when there are heavy thunderstorms," he said. "... we do know it's not our facility that's causing (the power failures)."

The plutonium processing facility was shut down as a precaution, because the staff at Technical Area-55 didn't want to put too much electrical load on the emergency generators, Roark said. No plutonium escaped from the building, and workers were never in danger, he added.

C.H. Keilers Jr., an investigator with the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, has issued two recent memos describing infrastructure and safety concerns at Technical Area-55, which began operations in 1978.

Longstanding infrastructure problems have allowed plutonium residue and waste inventories "to grow to where they impact both mission and safety," Keilers writes in an Aug. 25 memo.

Half of LANL's 9,000 nuclear material containers "are non-standard and suspect," and problems at the facility that treats Technical Area-55's radioactive waste "is a potential single point of failure."

Because of problems at the waste treatment facility, Technical Area-55 is nearing its plutonium residue storage capacity, "and is within 6 months of having to curtail pit operations unless resolved," the memo states.

LANL spokesman James Rickman said Thursday that the lab has taken care of the waste processing backlog and doesn't anticipate that any plutonium operations will be interrupted. The waste treatment facility is in the process of being upgraded, and a new facility is scheduled for completion in 2011, he said.

Meanwhile, LANL is in the process of upgrading infrastructure systems at Technical Area-55, according to Roark.

"The infrastructure investment thing is a priority," he said.

Keilers notes in one memo that over the next six years, LANL wants to significantly expand plutonium operations, including pit production. The lab is currently cleared to produce up to 20 pits a year but is seeking approval to make up to 80.

Lab critics, however, question how Technical Area-55 can handle an expanded pit production mission, considering the state of its aging facilities.

"It's not clear even if they can be fixed, let alone at what cost," Los Alamos Study Group executive director Greg Mello said. "LANL wasn't built to be a production plant."

Wednesday, October 4, 2006

Manhattan Project Buildings Preserved

By John Arnold
Journal Staff Writer

Historic preservationists this week will celebrate the restoration of once-crumbling Manhattan Project buildings, where scientists scrambled to develop the atomic bomb during World War II.

The dedication of Los Alamos National Laboratory's V Site will be accompanied by three days of public events commemorating the government's top-secret project.

"The Legacy of the Manhattan Project: Creativity in Science in the Arts" kicks off Thursday with a reunion of Manhattan Project veterans. On Friday, visitors can take a bus tour of Manhattan Project sites and attend the V Site dedication. Saturday's program includes a day-long symposium, with lectures by Manhattan Project veterans, scholars and artists.

The events reflect a growing effort— led by the Washington, D.C.-based Atomic Heritage Foundation— to restore and preserve Manhattan Project sites where, beginning in 1942, the nation's top scientists embarked on a race against Nazi researchers to develop the atomic bomb.

"We try to look at what was the Manhattan Project, what were the motives of the men and women who dedicated themselves on the home front during (World War II)," said foundation executive director Cindy Kelly.

Schedules, ticket prices and other information on this week's events are available at www.atomicheritage.org.

According to LANL historians, V Site is among the lab's most important set of Manhattan Project buildings, where scientists raced 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, and others were falling apart until the lab restored them with the help of a $700,000 Save America's Treasures grant.

Despite the makeover and ongoing efforts to incorporate such Manhattan Project sites into the national park system, V Site remains off-limits to the public because it sits behind the lab's security fence.

Organizers of this week's events had hoped the lab would open up the site for a public dedication ceremony, but the lab decided against it for security reasons, said LANL spokesman Todd Hansen. Friday's public dedication will be held at the Fuller Lodge Rose Garden.

Lack of public access, however, shouldn't stop restoration work, Kelly said. Many Manhattan project sites aren't on lab property but in the town of Los Alamos, preservationists note.

Others "are behind the fence now, but they might not be in 10 years, or sooner, or later," Kelly said. "Whatever patience it takes, we should have it. We should invest in this."

Of about 30 existing Manhattan Project facilities at the lab, LANL cultural resources specialists have identified five within the security perimeter that they think best represents

the Manhattan Project story, said Ellen McGehee, LANL's historic buildings project leader.

She said the lab's next restoration priority is the so-called Gun Site, a crumbling concrete bunker where atomic scientists developed Little Boy, the gun-type uranium bomb detonated over Hiroshima.

But efforts to preserve the Manhattan Project sites have drawn fire from anti-nuclear activists, who say memorializing them amounts to condoning the bombings of Japan.

"Will these sites be memorialized as mistakes, as enablers of despicable acts? Be real: they will not," Los Alamos Study Group executive director Greg Mello wrote in a letter to the National Park Service, which is exploring the possibility of including Manhattan Project sites in its system.

Kelly said that her group aims not to politicize the Manhattan Project but to put it in historical perspective.

"That's one reason we want to save the properties," she said, "so future generations and future scholars will have more to work with, to understand better how did this happen, who was responsible, where was it built."

WHAT: " The Legacy of the Manhattan Project: Creativity in Science in the Arts"

WHEN & WHERE:

Thursday-Saturday in Los Alamos

INFORMATION: Schedules, ticket prices and other information are available at www.atomicheritage.org., or call the Los Alamos Historical Museum, 662-6272

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Los Alamos Monitor

October 4, 2006

Guest Column

Pit production will change Los Alamos

In my last column (9/14/06) I made the case that Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) is well on the way to harboring a plutonium warhead core ("pit") factory, a kind "Modern Pit Facility,"now being assembled from existing facilities and proposed new ones.

Still, many serious hurdles remain before Los Alamos takes up the Rocky Flats mantle. LANL's facilities are old and they will be ill-suited for production even after the proposed repairs.

Neither LANL's existing and proposed buildings, nor its geographical setting, provide high physical security despite the heroic measures now beginning.

The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) acknowledges in its "Complex 2030" plan that LANL should not retain proliferation-sensitive inventories of special nuclear materials past 2022. Yet between now and 2014 the agency would like to invest a couple of billion dollars in production-related facilities at LANL.

This contradiction raises questions we can't answer here. What are we dealing with – incompetence, deception, runaway greed or deeper problems related to the irrationality at the heart of the nuclear weapons enterprise as a whole?

Or, as seems likely, all of the above?

Meanwhile anyone who cares about Los Alamos will want to take a very hard look at the consequences of hosting a pit factory. Pit production, like Goethe's story of the sorcerer's apprentice, is about somebody's desire for power that ends up being very hard to control.

Should plutonium manufacturing really take root in Los Alamos, the lab's culture will change dramatically. Science, however we define it, must be de-emphasized financially and culturally.

Pit production, with its associated security and safety needs and its expensive new construction, will trump most science. There are very few halfway measures – the costs and impacts tend to come in large chunks or not at all.

NNSA's highest priority is now the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) project and the associated "responsive infrastructure." LANL is the pivotal site for these slogans, because there is as yet no pit manufacturing capacity in the U.S. and pits will remain the rate-determining step for RRW manufacture.

Meanwhile LANL's overall budget is unlikely to grow and may decline somewhat. Within it, increases in management fee, pension fund contributions, and gross receipts tax have already occurred.

Inflation will keep happening. Increasing construction budgets, much of it supporting pit production and much of it currently low-balled, will cut further into program budgets.

The crystal ball is cloudy, but a decent guesstimate might be that these trends will cut science at LANL by about

half. LANS will protect pit production, because NNSA values it most highly and because the LANS partners value their $36.6 billion contract to manage LANL.

This will change the culture at LANL. Many good scientists won't come here. LANL may well evolve from what many staff understand to be a "science lab" with some manufacturing to a predominately manufacturing center that does a little science on the side.

Plutonium, with its panoply of costs, financial and otherwise, is thus rather toxic to non-plutonium science.

There's more, of course. Los Alamos County already has the largest active nuclear waste disposal site in New Mexico, much bigger by volume than WIPP. It is run, oddly enough, by the pit manufacturing directorate.

There's no permit or license, no lining, no cover and no commitment to ever remove any waste. Pit production and related activities make most of the new waste.

Cleanup? It's hard to believe NNSA will find the gigabucks necessary to clean up TA-54 and most of the other old dumps while dumping new waste every week, also in TA-54.

There will, of course, be accidents of one kind and another associated with pit production.

The key thing is not the risk of hypothetical future events but the way risk finds expression in everyday life, for example through heightened security.

Greg Mello is the director of the Los Alamos Study Group.

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2901 Summit Place NE Albuquerque, NM 87106, Phone: 505-265-1200, Fax: 505-265-1207

Group rescues atomic site

By Deborah Baker
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ALAMOS — As the secret community that gave birth to the atomic bomb morphed into a bustling government-lab town, many of its most historic sites remained tucked away.

Preservationists have had to go behind security fences to save remnants of the Manhattan Project they contend are as significant as George Washington's home or a Civil War battlefield. And this weekend, a series of events will mark a milestone — restoration of a wooden, garage-like building where the world's first plutonium bombs were assembled.

"It doesn't look like much," said Cynthia Kelly, president of the Washington-based Atomic Heritage Foundation, which is leading the drive to preserve key Atomic Age sites including those at Los Alamos; Oak Ridge, Tenn.; and Hanford, Wash.

"It's what happened there; it takes you back in time," Kelly said.

The simple structure — the first Manhattan Project work site to be restored — is a reminder of the urgency with which scientists gathered in 1943 to design and assemble the first atomic weapons.

There was no futuristic laboratory or sophisticated equipment on the mesa top where the federal government took over a boys' ranch school.

The newly restored "high bay" building was part of V Site, a collection of wooden, shed-type structures that were slated for demolition as part of a cleanup at Los Alamos National Laboratory. In 2000, the Cerro Grande fire swept through, destroying all but the high bay building.

McAllister Hull, a 21-year-old Army sergeant at the time of the Manhattan Project, recalls working in a casting building at V Site.

His job was to supervise the crews casting the explosive lenses that would direct pressure inward to compress a plutonium core in "the gadget," as the prototype of the "Fat Man" bomb was called.

"We actually used a candy kettle ... to melt the explosives, and then poured them into the mold to make the lenses," said Hull, a former professor of physics at Yale University and the University of New Mexico and a former UNM provost.

When the mixture of explosives wasn't the right consistency, Hull resorted to his experience making ice cream sodas in the college cafeteria. He fashioned stirrers, with little paddles at the end of a metal rod, to stir the explosive soup.

The "gadget" was put together — minus the plutonium — at the "high bay" building. In July 1945, it was fully assembled and detonated at the Trinity Site, 200 miles to the south.

Less than a month later, a similar bomb was dropped on the Japanese city of Nagasaki, three days after the uranium-based "Little Boy" bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.

The "high bay" building — which Kelly said cost about $1 million to restore — is still behind security fences, and the first of two ceremonies on Friday to mark the restoration is open only by invitation.

A second ceremony was scheduled for the public at Fuller Lodge, the ranch school's original main building.

Anti-nuclear activist Greg Mello, who heads the Los Alamos Study Group, objects to the celebratory aura surrounding the events, saying they "don't have the tone of grief and remorse" that any commemoration of what led to the bombing of the Japanese cities should have.

"The legacy is fear, and ... enormous national efforts devoted to weapons of mass destruction, and we're still struggling with that today," Mello said.

Funding for restoration of the "high bay" building came from the federal government, $700,000 of it through the "Save America's Treasures" program.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

New Mexico commemorating Manhattan Project's rickety first bomb-making building

Published: October 6, 2006

LOS ALAMOS, New Mexico Even as a secret community that gave birth to the atomic bomb morphed into a bustling government-lab town, many of its most historic sites remained tucked away from view.

But preservationists have gone behind the security fences to preserve for the first time a structure in which the Manhattan Project scientists did their work at Los Alamos National Laboratory. They contend the building is as significant as George Washington's home or a Civil War battlefield.

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Cynthia Kelly is president of Washington, D.C.-based Atomic Heritage Foundation, which is leading a drive to preserve key atomic-age sites at Los Alamos; Oak Ridge, Tennessee; and Hanford, Washington.

"It doesn't look like much," she said. "It's what happened there. It takes you back in time."

The simple structure is a reminder of the urgency with which scientists gathered in 1943 to design and assemble the first atomic weapons. There was no futuristic laboratory or sophisticated equipment on the mesa top where the federal government took over a boys' ranch school.

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In July 1945, the bomb was fully assembled and detonated at the Trinity Site, 200 miles (320 kilometers) to the south. Less than a month later, a similar bomb was dropped on the Japanese city of Nagasaki, three days after the uranium-based "Little Boy" bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.

The "high bay" building, which Kelly said cost about US$1 million to restore, is still behind security fences. Kelly said although the building is inaccessible to the public, she hopes that will change.

Weekend events include bus tours, a reception and dinner, and a symposium featuring writers and artists.

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He said the events should have a "tone of grief and remorse" since they commemorate work that led to the bombing of the Japanese cities.

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Funding for restoration of the "high bay" building came from the federal government. Several other sites at Los Alamos also are slated for preservation.

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER
http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/national/1110AP_Manhattan_Project_Preservation.html

Friday, October 6, 2006 · Last updated 2:53 a.m. PT

Manhattan Project building preserved

By DEBORAH BAKER
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

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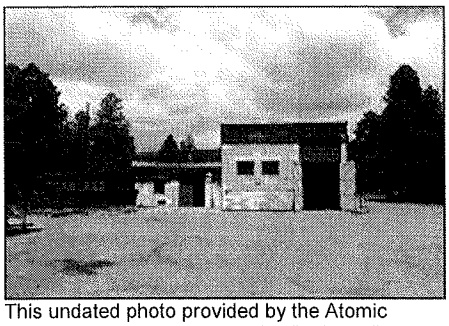

This undated photo provided by the Atomic Heritage Foundation shows the "high bay" building at Los Alamos National Laboratory in Los Alamos, N.M. The building was part of V Site, a collection of wooden, shed-type structures that were slated for demolition as part of a cleanup at Los Alamos National Laboratory until preservationists jumped in. In 2000, the Cerro Grande fire swept through, destroying all but the high bay building. The simple structure - the first Manhattan Project work site to be restored - is a reminder of the urgency with which scientists gathered in 1944 to design and assemble the first atomic weapons. (AP photo/Los Alamos National Laboratory via Atomic Heritage Museum)

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abcNEWS

Manhattan Project Building Preserved

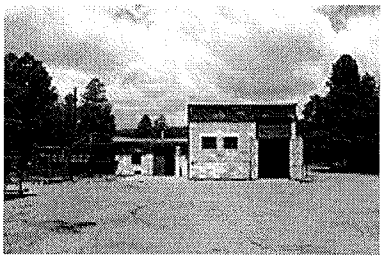
New Mexico Commemorating Manhattan Project's Rickety First Bomb-Making Building

By DEBORAH BAKER

October 6, 2006

The Associated Press

New Mexico Commemorating Manhattan Project's Rickety First Bomb-Making Building



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Rocky Mountain News

URL: http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/local/article/0,1299,DRMN_15_5046735,00.html

Nuclear history preserved at Los Alamos

By Deborah Baker, Associated Press
October 6, 2006

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http://oneutah.org/2006/10/09/why-are-we-celebrating-devastation/

October 9th, 2006 by Deanna Taylor

Why Are We Celebrating Devastation?

In today's *Salt Lake Tribune*:

Birthplace of Bomb Restored

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''It doesn't look like much,'' she said. ''It's what happened there. It takes you back in time.''

Out of the $1 million it is taking to restore the "shack" where the atomic bomb was born in Los Alamos, NM, $700,000 is coming from our tax dollars (implied by the fact that the Federal Government is funding this project).

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A nuclear cloud. Sixty years after the first atomic bomb was tested in the New Mexico desert, the United States still has some 2,000 nuclear weapons on hair trigger alert and is considering new weapons such as earth-penetrating bunker busters. (AFP/File)

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Terry Riely, left, protests at the regents meeting held in the SUB Ballroom on Wednesday.

Arrested activist's wife, supporters speak to regents

Marcella Ortega

Posted: 10/11/06

by Marcella Ortega

Daily Lobo

Jeanne Pahls, wife of former UNM professor and antiwar activist Robert Anderson, said she is upset by her husband's Sept. 29 arrest.

"I'm wondering why the police feel the need to slam someone on the ground for speaking the truth at a meeting that never should have occurred at UNM," she said. "I don't think that has any place at a university."

Pahls and at least five other people spoke in support of Anderson at a Board of Regents meeting Tuesday.

Anderson was arrested on felony charges of battery on a police officer at a symposium about nuclear warheads at the SUB.

He said he was protesting the symposium because it didn't provide a balanced discussion about nuclear weapons.

He pleaded not guilty to the charge on Oct. 1.

"My husband went down there to speak the truth, and for it, he got shoved to the ground," Pahls said. "That's what happens when someone speaks the truth. It is a shameful day for the University."

Regent Mel Eaves said he takes issue with anyone who tries to limit free speech and is why Anderson's supporters were allowed to speak at the meeting.

Eaves did not attend the symposium.

"I don't know who was allowed to speak (at the symposium) and who wasn't," he said.

President David Harris declined comment.

Joseph Cecchi, dean of the UNM School of Engineering, said the Department of Defense provides research funding for schools, but there is no weapons research at UNM.

Cecchi said it is typical for universities to receive funds from the department without using it to research weapons.

Greg Mello, executive director of Los Alamos Study Group, an organization that supports nuclear disarmament, attended the symposium and spoke at the meeting. He said the symposium's panel did not represent the diversity of views on the weapons issue.

"There wasn't anything like an academic discussion going on," he said. "I think he was the least violent person in the room."

FREE NewMexican

Lab looks to rework more contracts

print

By ANDY LENDERMAN | The New Mexican
October 13, 2006

Company wants to renegotiate provision that calls for labs to spend $625 million with small businesses

Big Picture

The private company that manages Los Alamos National Laboratory wants to renegotiate part of its contract with the federal government that calls for it to spend $625 million with small businesses in the coming year, U.S. Rep. Tom Udall, D-N.M., said Wednesday.

Los Alamos National Security, LLC, which manages the lab, announced recently that approximately 350 contract workers would be laid off because of a $175 million budget shortfall. Now the company wants to renegotiate a contract provision that calls for the lab to spend $625 million with small businesses in the 2007 fiscal year, which began Oct. 1, Udall said.

Related Links

Official Tom Udall Congressional site

Los Alamos National Laboratory

Los Alamos Study Group

Los Alamos National Security, LLC

``Now with the shortfall, the position that's being taken by (Los Alamos National Security officials) is that they're going to have to put these provisions on hold," Udall said by telephone Wednesday. ``They are going to renegotiate these provisions with the Department of Energy. And so the small-business contracting community has gone from being very hopeful ... to being very discouraged and angry and critical of what is happening to them."

A lab spokesman said he could not comment Thursday. A spokesman for U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., said Domenici was unaware of lab plans to renegotiate the small-business spending requirement.

Udall met privately with contractors in Los Alamos on Wednesday and also met separately with Lab Deputy Director John Mitchell.

Mitchell issued a memo to lab managers Thursday regarding the $175 million shortfall, which was recently discussed by lab Director Michael Anastasio.

``As Mike stated in his talk," Mitchell wrote, ``our review indicated that an estimated 350 contractor positions would be eliminated, saving an estimated $75 million to $85 million."

The lab might save another $75 million by ``rethinking, cutting back, consolidating, and deferring such things as materials and equipment, travel and facilities work," Mitchell wrote.

And another 200 contract positions also could be eliminated, he wrote. ``Thus, our review process is not complete," Mitchell wrote. He has established a budget review team that should complete another analysis by mid-December.

``Once this is complete," Mitchell wrote, ``we will be able to provide you with a more accurate and complete (fiscal 2007) budget picture. We all realize this is an anxious time, and we appreciate your patience and tolerance."

The company also wants to renegotiate other parts of its federal contract that relate to small businesses besides the provision calling for it to spend $625 with such businesses, Udall said.

Los Alamos National Security LLC is a partnership consisting of Bechtel National, the University of California, BWX Technologies Inc. and Washington Group International. Late last year, it won a seven-year contract which could earn it up to $79 million a year to manage the lab for the National Nuclear Security Administration.

``I was pushing for very specific small-business provisions in the contract," Udall said. `` ... This is one of the reasons that they got this contract, is the representations they made about small business. I don't have any doubt about that."

The lab has reported spending $538 million, or 55.5 percent of its procurement budget for goods and services that support the lab, in New Mexico during the 2004 fiscal year. Seventy-four percent of that was spent in Northern New Mexico.

The lab's budget is about $2.2 billion this year. It has 8,290 full-time employees, 1,617 postdoctoral researchers and students, and more than 2,500 contract employees.

``This is sending a cold chill through the small-business community," Udall said. ``... They don't know what's going to come out. I urged the deputy director to move this along quickly."

Udall also said it's unclear who will be laid off as a result of the budget shortfall. ``I think we're at the front end of the layoffs," he said. ``... I'm not so sure that the individuals have specifically heard who is going to lose their job."

Domenici has said nobody at the lab should expect a financial bailout from Congress now or in the coming years. He declined to be interviewed Thursday. His spokesman said the National Nuclear Security Administration has indicated its budget requests to Congress will be flat in coming years.

Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group said Congress is looking for ways to save money, and he thinks the lab's budget is ``bigger than it needs to be for the basic version of its mission."

Contact Andy Lenderman at 995-3827 orlenderman@sfnewmexican.com

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Attackers must share in the blame

Dear Editor,

I am astonished to find myself in even partial agreement with Greg Mello as he commented in Wednesday's guest column: Los Alamos Lab will be significantly reducing its science component in favor of pit production under LANS.
As LANL technical employees are no longer university researchers (albeit not faculty and on soft money) but are now simply ordinary defense contractors (without stock options!), the quality of people being attracted to our county will undoubtedly decline.

Unfortunately, Mr. Mello fails to acknowledge, or perhaps even recognize, how much he and the organizations with which he associates have promoted this end. The unrelenting attacks on UC rather than DOE as the source ("root cause") of LANL mismanagement contributed mightily to this result. Their efforts lacked shrewdness and affected only the easy targets ("cannon fodder") that were provided precisely for that purpose .

Even allowing for the best of motives, Mr. Mello and his associates must be faulted for a complete lack of understanding and total misjudgment of the most likely outcome of their efforts.

Hopefully, a sense of chastisement will improve their decisions about future actions. I also suggest that they be wary of supporters whose ultimate goal is the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

For better or for worse, it must be recognized that is something that will never happen.

Terry Goldman

Los Alamos

THE INDEPENDENT

21 October 2006 08:42

Aldermaston recruits scientists 'to work on nuclear warheads'

By Colin Brown, Deputy Political Editor

Published: 20 October 2006

Fresh evidence that work on testing a nuclear warhead is being planned at the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston has been uncovered by anti-nuclear campaigners.

The disclosure could leave the Prime Minister open to allegations of deceiving Parliament. Tony Blair promised MPs that they will have a parliamentary debate before the Government gives the go-ahead for a replacement for Britain's Trident nuclear weapon system.

The Cabinet is to discuss replacing the controversial weapon system at the end of the year. The Prime Minister has denied that a decision in principle was taken before the election.

But campaigners at Greenpeace said they had identified the recruitment of 25 extra scientists at Aldermaston for work on a new warhead. They are being recruited as part of a massive expansion at Aldermaston, costing £350m a year over the next three years to build powerful lasers capable of testing nuclear technology in the laboratory. AWE chiefs described it as the biggest construction site in England, and have compared it with the fifth terminal at Heathrow.

From July 2005 - immediately after the last general election - to March this year, Aldermaston recruited 90 scientists, 250 engineers, 57 technical support staff and 98 business services staff. It now plans to recruit a further 700 staff by the end of March, 2008.

The Government has repeatedly insisted the extra staff were being hired to maintain the safety of the existing Trident system, after reports in The Independent that Downing Street had agreed in principle to upgrade the weapon. But Greenpeace has a dossier directly challenging the assurances by the former defence secretary John Reid and other ministers.

Greenpeace said the most significant finding was that Aldermaston is recruiting an extra 25 scientists with expertise in hydrodynamics testing which allows nuclear weapons laboratories to gather test data previously available only from underground nuclear tests, such as the one 11 days ago by North Korea. They will bring the total number of scientists in this field to 90.

"The only real use for hydrodynamic expertise, according to Greg Mello, the director of the Los Alamos [nuclear plant in the US] Study Group, is for designing a new weapon," said Greenpeace.

"We are also seeing the increased co-operation between the UK and the US that might be expected if a nuclear weapon programme was under way."

This included a doubling in the number of meetings between Aldermaston scientists and their US counterparts. The MoD has also appointed a senior US nuclear weapons scientist, Don Cook, to manage Aldermaston.

Greenpeace said the AWE admitted in 2002 that the capability to build a successor to Trident would have to be achieved "without conducting nuclear tests", underlining the need for the specialist scientists.

The dossier also claims that Cherie Blair's legal chambers, Matrix, has advised another anti-nuclear group, Peacerights, that the replacement of Trident "is likely to constitute a breach" of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which Britain has signed.

"The UK investment programme at Aldermaston is turning the comprehensive test ban treaty into a hollow shell that allows those states with advanced technology to develop new nuclear weapons without nuclear testing," said the report.

The dossier said the NPT would collapse and there would be no legal restraints on other states such as Iran and North Korea gaining nuclear weapons if those who had signed it were seen to be breaking it.

It warned that "a state, sooner or later, will actually use a nuclear weapon".

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Feds bid to transform weapons complex

ROGER SNODGRASS roger@lamonitor.com Monitor Assistant Editor

Los Alamos National Laboratory may get the full-time job that has gone vacant since the Rocky Flats facility was shuttered in 1989. LANL is currently the only place in the country where "pits," or triggers for nuclear weapons, can be produced
Whether it gets an even bigger assignment depends on factors to be weighed under a new Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, a quest embarked upon by the National Nuclear Security Administration on Thursday.

Ultimately, the decision hangs on yet-to-be-determined evaluations concerning the Defense Department's interest and pocketbook, numbers of pits to be produced, costs, transportation factors, how much nuclear material would need to be moved around, how well it could be protected and whether it would be more or less secure at Los Alamos than elsewhere, according to a senior NNSA official.

Among the first priorities of the proposal would be to select a site to be known as the "consolidated plutonium center," where a "baseline capacity of 125 qualified pits per year" would be produced.

Under the current draft environmental impact statement at LANL, NNSA has proposed an interim capability of 80 pits, in order to obtain 50 that can be certified.

The consolidated plutonium center would also be responsible for long-term research and development and surveillance in addition to manufacturing, according to the notice.

A spokesman for Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., said this morning the senator supports NNSA's objectives to modernize the nuclear weapons complex and to make it more cost-effective.

"He supports the forward movement, without saying specifically whether the laboratory should get this or that," said Chris Gallegos from the senator's office.

Concerning the plan to expand pit production, he added that a no action alternative to be included in the evaluation could "leave the pit capacity where it is now."

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., campaigning in New Mexico, responded to a question about the possibility that LANL might be selected for the consolidated plutonium center.

"Given the site's layout on a mesa with surrounding local communities, LANL does not appear to be suited to become home to the nation's central storage facility for weapons plutonium," Bingaman said.

A spokesman for Rep. Tom Udall, D-N.M., Tom Nagle said, "From the briefings we've had, it doesn't look like Los Alamos is the best place for this."

In addition to Los Alamos, other sites under consideration for the consolidated plutonium center are Nevada Test Site, Pantex Plant, Y-12 National Security Complex and the Savannah River Site.

The plan explicitly rejected the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board's task force suggestion that there be a single consolidated nuclear production center for all weapons-related activity involving a significant amount of nuclear materials, as well as its idea that the transformation could be accelerated to take place by 2015.

Kevin Roark, a spokesman for LANL, said this morning, the laboratory has been working with NNSA on the Complex 2030 plan for some time.

"It's very early in the process," he said. "None of the plan is decided yet."

If the task of production does fall to Los Alamos, NNSA Deputy Director for Defense Programs Thomas D'Agostino's view is that managing a national scientific laboratory is not the same as managing a nuclear pit manufacturing facility and may even require a separate manager at Los Alamos.

The major revision in the way the country organizes work on its nuclear stockpile arises 15 years after the fall of the Soviet Union and was described as an effort to transform and modernize the Cold-War-era nuclear weapons complex.

"I feel a sense of urgency," D'Agostino said, comparing the complex to an old house or automobile. "You have to keep pouring money in it to keep it going," he said. "Meanwhile the world has changed dramatically."

NNSA is relying on a new concept, known as the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW), to enable the complex to modernize and become sustainable for the long run. Although RRW is barely mentioned in the initial document, it is an apparent catalyst for change throughout.

NNSA Administrator Linton Brooks has described RRWs

as "replacements for existing stockpile weapons that could be more easily manufactured with more readily available and more environmentally benign materials, and whose safety and reliability could be assured with the highest confidence, without nuclear testing, for as long as the United States requires nuclear forces."

An RRW design competition between LANL and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California concluded recently, but the results are still being evaluated.

The Bush administration's doctrine on nuclear weapons, the Nuclear Posture Review of 2002, called for a nuclear stockpile that reflected that the Cold War is over and contains the lowest possible number of warheads for current security needs.

D'Agostino emphasized significant reductions in the size of the nuclear stockpile and plans for reduction under the Treaty of Moscow, in which the U.S. and Russia agreed to limit themselves to1700-2200 operationally-deployed nuclear weapons by 2012.

To that number the notice added "augmentation weapons, reliability reserve weapons and weapons required to meet NATO commitments."

The apparently new category of "augmentation weapons" is not defined in the document, noted Jay Coghlan of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, among several nuclear watchdogs who are following the new developments.

The Alliance for Nuclear Accountability, a national network of watchdog groups called the plan a "bombplex" and said the Reliable Replacement Warhead "will potentially drive a new nuclear weapons arms race, in order to carry out the expanded first strike options envisioned in the 2002 Nuclear Posture Review."

Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group said whether people were in favor or opposed to pit production at LANL, we would have to come to grips with a fundamental problem.

"We can't just provide management review for one proposal after another to make more nuclear weapons," he said. "The country needs to decide whether we're gong to make nuclear weapons the centerpiece of world security, which means everybody is going to have to get them, or whether we're going to lead the way to a safer world where nuclear weapons can be everywhere condemned."

Thursday's announcement kicks off a 90-day scoping and comment period that will end on Jan. 17, 2007.

Britain 'plans new nuclear warhead'.
Canberra Times (Oct 21, 2006): pNA.

(From Canberra Times)

Fresh evidence work on testing a new nuclear warhead is being planned at the top-secret Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston was uncovered by anti- nuclear campaigners yesterday.

The disclosure could leave the Prime Minister open to allegations of deceiving Parliament. Tony Blair promised MPs that they would have a parliamentary debate before the Government gave the go-ahead for a replacement for Britain's Trident nuclear weapon system. The cabinet is due to discuss replacing the controversial weapon system soon. The Prime Minister has denied that a decision in principle was taken before the election.

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"The only real use for hydrodynamic expertise, according to Greg Mello, the director of the Los Alamos [nuclear facility in the US] Study Group, is for designing a new weapon," Greenpeace said. "We are also seeing the kind of increased cooperation between the UK and the US that might be expected if a nuclear weapon program was under way." This included a doubling in the number of meetings between Aldermaston scientists and their US counterparts. Greenpeace said the Atomic Weapons Establishment admitted in 2002 that the capability to build a successor to Trident would have to be achieved "without conducting nuclear tests", underlining the need for the specialist scientists. - The Independent

Watch new LANL operation

11/22/06

Dear Editor,

I agree with most of the points Terry Goldman made in his letter of 10/14 ("Attackers must share in the blame").

I gladly admit, though, that I am among those who drew attention to binding international and domestic legal requirements for complete nuclear disarmament. I think they make good moral, geopolitical, military, economic and national-security sense, now more than ever. Many of the most important benefits of disarmament accrue early in the process. But that is an argument for another day, hopefully soon in this space.

In the 1990s I worked occasionally (without success) to cause the LANL operating contract to be competed. I also said that the government-owned, contractor-operated (GOCO) model inherited from WWII was not a good management model, period. However unpopular virtually everywhere, I thought (and still think) that federalizing LANL would be a good idea.

The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) is currently more than 96-percent privatized. Just nine companies spend half of DOE's entire budget. One, the Bechtel Group, is now a partner in contracts valued by DOE at $100 billion. Bechtel is now bidding on Livermore as well. For more see lasg.org/NNSAPrivatization.pdf.

Since 2000 my views have matured on the contract recompete question. I for one didn't work for phony "competition" that would substitute bad for-profit management for bad UC management. For the reasons Mr. Goldman stated, I didn't think those efforts were very shrewd either.

NNSA no doubt wanted UC out of LANL for a variety of reasons; no doubt high among them was a desire to transform LANL's mission. For watchdogs, UC management was an easy and deserving target, but I think this played right into NNSA's agenda.

A great deal of nonprofit effort in this field is wasted in peripheral, even surrogate, issues that usually generate far more heat than light.

Greg Mello

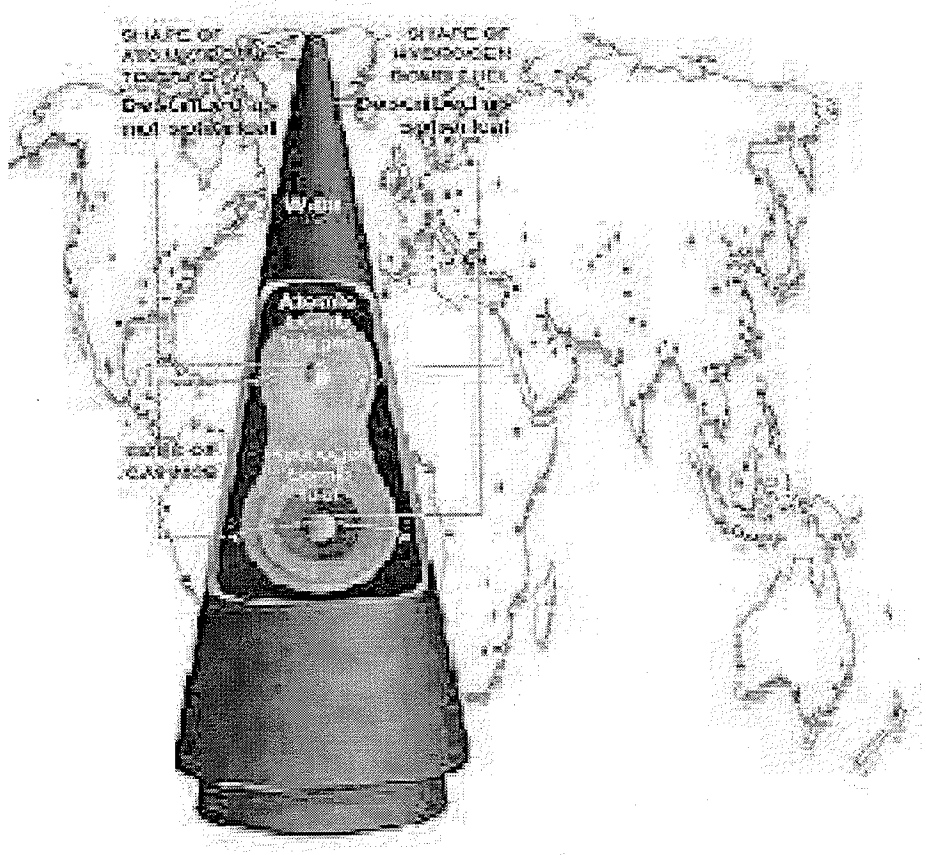
Nuclear Weapons & American Empire

"'Reliable Replacement' Warheads and the Quest for Nuclear Legitimacy"

A discussion with Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group*

The UC-managed Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) may soon begin producing plutonium pits for the US nuclear weapons stockpile. This shift reflects a transformation across the nuclear complex to build new warheads for new missions. Lab leaders and some military planners envision an arsenal of more usable weapons to be deployed into the foreseeable future. They also recognize that without a clear mission the laboratories scientific and technical workforces will atrophy. Additionally, war planners recognize that for the US to maintain and expand its arsenal it must quickly begin producing plutonium pits.

The University of California's role in all of this is center stage: barring adequate opposition, it will very soon research, design, and build these bombs.



**Dedicated to research and political organizing, the Los Alamos Study Group seeks nuclear disarmament, environmental protection, social justice, and economic sustainability.*

2 pm Monday, October 23rd
McCune Conference Room, 6th Floor of HSSB

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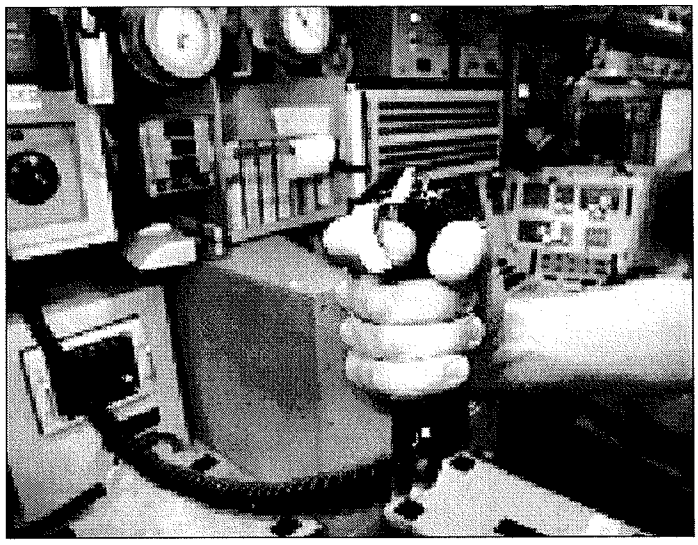
Greg Mello

Los Alamos Study Group



This is the launch trigger for Trident missiles on an Ohio-class submarine. If loaded with eight W88 warheads, one missile contains more explosive power than all the explosives used in World War II. Photo from *Face to Face with the Bomb: Nuclear Reality after the Cold War* by Paul Shambroom, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

http://www.eldoradosun.com/Mello.htm

PERSONAL PRACTICAL GLOBAL
SUN monthly

November 2006

Plutonium Pit Manufacturing and the Quest for Nuclear Credibility

Greg Mello

Late next year, if all goes as planned, Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) is slated to begin production of plutonium warhead cores ("pits") for the U.S. nuclear stockpile. The United States has produced no new pits since 1989, and because of this it has produced no entirely new warheads since then either. If and when LANL begins production, warhead manufacturing will start up at a handful of plants around the country again, after a hiatus of some 18 years.

Whether this happens or not depends substantially on whether citizens in northern New Mexico want plutonium manufacturing as their fastest-growing industry, and on whether, how

and with what firmness they express their desires in the matter. If indeed production does get up and running — which has been the central purpose of the transformations forced on the lab over the past few years — LANL's rate of manufacturing pits will determine the overall U.S. weapons-production rate, since making pits is the hardest and the slowest part of the entire process.

LANL has not had this job since 1949. The facilities in which production is gearing up to take place weren't built with this in mind and are decades old. They need major renovation and are plagued by long-standing safety issues. Despite their intense interest in getting pit production running at LANL as fast and hard as possible, there is as yet no clear sign that either the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) or the Bechtel-led consortium that runs LANL has budgeted enough money or time to solve these problems. Neither do they have a clear plan as to how to make pits while also carrying out the major renovations needed in the facilities being used.

Whether despite these problems or because of them, $2.5 billion in inflation-corrected dollars has been spent at LANL since 1995 to get ready for the day, should it come, when the first shiny little pit — a "keeper," not one made for testing — comes off the line. A pit is built like an ellipsoidal or spherical ball with one or more metallic shells inside — somewhat like a nesting *matryoshka* doll — with the innermost shell made of plutonium.

Another $3 billion or more is slated to be spent between now and 2014 to sustain and increase LANL's pit production, of which fully $2 billion is for new and improved facilities. By 2014, the rate of production is projected to rise to at least 50 pits per year. Following that, production is supposed to speed up further as new facilities begin to come online. Last year the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board said LANL could make, and therefore *should* make, about 200 pits per year.

When (and if) completed, pits made at LANL would be sent to the Pantex assembly plant located a few miles east of Amarillo, Texas. There, in semiunderground chambers, each of these metal eggs would be surrounded by high explosives and provided with a few other parts. At this point the device would become, in effect, a small atomic bomb, capable of releasing the explosive energy of a whole trainload of explosives.

If this assembly, called a "primary" in the weapons-of-mass-destruction trade, is then placed in a uranium shell along with a "secondary" thermonuclear explosive, some rigid foam and a couple of other parts, the result is a "nuclear explosive package," or "physics package." When this is put in a cone-shaped shell (a "reentry vehicle") with a variety of electrical and mechanical parts, it becomes a nuclear warhead, in this case a high-yield warhead called a "W88." W88s have an explosive yield of almost a half million tons of TNT.

The warheads are next loaded onto missiles. Up to eight W88s are placed on a platform called a "bus" (so called because the warheads get off the "bus" independently for their different destinations) inside a Trident missile. Twenty-four such missiles are loaded into each of 14 Ohio-class submarines.

Loaded in this way, just one of these missiles carries the equivalent of all the explosive power used in World War II. Just one of these warheads, if exploded at full yield over a large city, would kill hundreds of thousands of people by blast, radioactivity and the ensuing firestorm. It's the firestorm that military planners especially don't like to talk about, even more than fallout. Its

widespread, total destruction contradicts the "precision" targeting ideals deeply ingrained in U.S. military culture.

How many such explosions would be necessary before full societal collapse occurred? Not too many, probably, if key spots are targeted.

THE CRAFTSMAN'S LEGACY

Present nuclear threats and future nuclear strikes begin with that metal Easter egg, so hard to make — thin, heavy and a bit warm to the touch. At Los Alamos and afterward, with each successive step of assembly and then deployment, a monstrous reality takes shape: a very real and eminently portable hell on Earth, deliverable to any nation or people within 30 minutes guaranteed — an efficient, high-tech holocaust-on-demand. Once such a machine is assembled, the right person — it needn't be the president, you know — can switch it on with no more than a few strokes on a keyboard or a few spoken words.

Those who make plutonium pits hope they will just sit in a bunker for decades, but the fact is, once their craftsmanship is done they have no more say in the matter. The time when they could have saved lives and been faithful to human ideals will be past. Long after those who make them die, those nested metal balls may remain in careful readiness, a lasting legacy of terror, waiting for the word that would doom a hundred thousand families. It happened before, with a pit made in Los Alamos.

Those who plan such a thing and work to make it possible say they hope it will never happen. Well, that and a buck fifty will get you a cup of coffee, because without an utterly credible threat, nuclear weapons have no coercive value — which means no value at all. At the worker-bee level, "no value" translates into "no job" and "no paycheck." How could the threat of nuclear attack be credible to an enemy but not to us? Either the threat is credible — that is, real — or it's not.

Former Sandia Labs president Paul Robinson used to say that it's "overwhelming terror" that puts the "terr" in nuclear deterrence. Producing that same overwhelming terror puts thousands of paychecks in New Mexico bank accounts. Poor New Mexico — the quaint and complaisant little *colonia* where the United States does almost half of its warhead work, including the dirty and dangerous jobs nobody else wants. Poor New Mexico — so far from God, so close to Los Alamos. Denial of these realities is one of the defining cultural features of Santa Fe today; there is far less denial in the Espanola Valley. Those who think this has been good for New Mexico will have to explain to the rest of us why the state's income rankings have fallen so low relative to other states at the same time the labs' budgets have risen so high.

But wait. Aren't there "surgical" nuclear missions, very special missions in today's world that only nuclear weapons can do — like destroying bad guys or germ-warfare agents in deep bunkers, like in the movies? Isn't there a role there for a new kind of nuclear strike force, aka "deterrent"?

It's too long a story for this article to take up these cases and others one at a time. But the bottom line is this: From a strictly military perspective, all the military problems for which new nuclear weapons — earth-penetrating nukes, mininukes, any nukes — are supposed to provide solutions either have other far better military solutions or no military solutions at all. This is true

even from the most callous military and strategic perspective, the imperial perspective from which these things are typically viewed in the halls of power today.

Once all the euphemisms and the self-serving, illogical fantasies are stripped away (these fantasies are far more common among civilian nuclear promoters than in the military), those who think they see military value in nuclear weapons are not thinking about the big picture hard enough. Most New Mexicans, long accustomed to the "national security" mantle wrapped around the labs, are usually surprised to learn that most military brass don't like nuclear weapons very much, for a heap of good reasons.

PRESERVING THE PRIESTHOOD

Today the United States has about 23,000 pits, give or take a thousand or two. There are almost 10,000 in weapons, of which perhaps 2,000 reside in an underground bunker complex about a mile south of Albuquerque's Sunport. (There are more nuclear weapons in that bunker than anywhere else on Earth.) The rest of the pits are stored at the Pantex Plant near Amarillo. Of those, 5,000 have been designated a "strategic reserve" to be kept in case something goes wrong with deployed pits.

Nobody knows for sure how long all these pits will last. The official minimum lifespan is still "45 to 60 years" — two different numbers, giving all of us ample notice of what a finely tuned enterprise this is (not!). Some advisors to NNSA, the agency that runs the weapons labs and plants, believe pit longevity may be significantly greater than 60 years. This would of course greatly affect any "need" to make new pits. Pits, it seems, can even "improve" with age as their inherent radiation anneals away internal irregularities.

If we don't crush and dispose of them first, future generations may figure out the shelf life of pits. Or maybe they never will, having more important things to do. We know, however, when pits were made. We can say, for example, that if the U.S. government so decides, there will still be 6,000 pits that are 60 years of age or less in 2045. Since that's almost four decades from now, perhaps even die-hard nuclear aficionados ought not to panic about "pit aging."

Pit aging (and warhead aging overall) is not the reason NNSA wants to restart nuclear-warhead production — workforce aging is. To keep the nuclear enterprise going, nuclear skills, knowledge, values and culture must be transmitted to a new generation. Through new designs and new manufacturing, NNSA and its allies seek to renew the labs and manufacturing plants in every way possible.

NNSA understands what many well-meaning liberal activists do not: the nuclear enterprise is fragile, weak and as dependent upon unwritten knowledge, belief and a supporting social consensus as it is upon hardware and money. Polls show there is no support for anything but a declining nuclear-weapons enterprise headed for mutual disarmament pursuant to treaties already signed and ratified. So a great deal of effort is put into fabricating an illusion of legitimacy, especially inside the labs and plants themselves, where workers can be easily indoctrinated.

THE QUEST FOR CREDIBILITY

The only other reason pit production is needed is because NNSA wants new kinds of weapons that won't "self-deter," as they put it. "Self-deterrence" is the strategic equivalent of

conscience. If only nuclear weapons weren't so powerful, the story goes; if only they were more accurate, more flexible as to yield; if only we could be sure that nobody could get hold of a dud and use it; if only bombs could burrow another few meters into the earth; if only they had a more powerful electromagnetic pulse so they could be detonated in a place and manner that would not cause as much (political) fallout — if only they were different and better, they could be more easily used and so the threats we make with them would be more credible.

In other words, new weapons are "needed" because nobody has yet been able to come up with a convincing use for the existing ones. Since this is America, the answer must lie in technological progress. Of course, all the existing nuclear weapons were once said to be "solutions" to the credibility problems of prior weapons, and so on back.

As stated before, none of the technical proposals for new nuclear weapons are convincing from a military point of view. They blow things up and kill a lot of people, and they do so in a way that makes the overall military and strategic situation much worse, in every possible case. None solve the overwhelming moral, political, legal, military and strategic problems that accompany every contemplated use of nuclear weapons and that indeed lie in the contemplation and in the weapons themselves.

But NNSA knows its real audience, which is in Washington, D.C., not Tehran or Beijing. The key people who must be convinced sit on a few congressional committees. In Washington a more credible deterrent *does* require new warheads and, hence, new pits. Increased credibility to that small audience — the audience that really counts — happens not because the warheads are different or "better," but because they are *new*. Sheer momentum and investment per se, the gloss of newness, is indeed the coin of the realm. Investment creates belief, which is to say credibility. Investment creates value, as any stockbroker knows. So new pits and new warheads, if pursued, will definitely create a more credible deterrent — to budget cuts. It is not at all clear that there is any other nuclear deterrence.

The sales problem for NNSA, the labs and advocates like Senator Domenici is that while "credible" is a nice word to a politician's ear, and an important one too, "usable" in connection with nuclear weapons is not. And the path to a more "credible" deterrent lies only through more "usable" weapons. "Usable" translates pretty quickly into "stupid," "deeply wrong" or even "suicidal" for people who don't have a financial or career interest in nuclear weapons.

In the final analysis, NNSA's core argument is that we must make pits . . . in order to make pits. It will cost us our self-respect, our environment, about $100 billion or so — and all hope of preventing nuclear proliferation. Are we going to do this, or not? I hope you will reflect on this personally because Congress is largely asleep at the switch on this question, leaving this decision largely up to "we the people" in practical terms.

What can be done? There is no one-size-fits-all answer to this question; political effectiveness is usually a very sensitive function of time and commitment, but there are very simple things you can do as well. Please write me at gmello@lasg.org or call our main office at (505) 265-1200 if you think you might want to help. Or visit www.lasg.org and look through the recent "Action Alerts" for more background on the issues and ways to work against the appalling plans to resume nuclear warhead manufacturing after all these years.

www.dailynexus.com
http://www.dailynexus.com/news/2006/12544.html

Group Seeks Student Support to Challenge UC Nuclear Research

■ The Coalition to Demilitarize the UC Argues for Rescending University Management of Three Labs

by Alexander Gorst - *Reporter*
Wednesday, November 15, 2006

The Coalition to Demilitarize the UC issued a call to arms this week, asking students to protest the University of California's involvement in nuclear research and weapons production.

The coalition, a UC-wide organization, wants students and faculty to attend Thursday's UC Regents meeting at UC Los Angeles in order to persuade the decision-making body to cut ties with three national laboratories. The Regents are scheduled to discuss employee retirement issues of one at the labs, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, on that day.

"[We will] demand the Regents divest the university's good name and intellectual resources from the new arms race," the coalition announced to its supporters via e-mail.

The University of California has managed the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) in New Mexico and the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) near San Francisco for over 50 years. The UC has also maintained Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL), located near the UC Berkeley campus, for roughly 70 years. All three labs engage in some form of nuclear research.

The UC's contract to manage LANL, which was once again awarded to the University this year, is worth $512 million over the next seven years with the possibility of a 13-year extension. Last year, the UC won a bid to extend its stewardship over LBNL, and it is still in the bidding process for a new contract for LLNL.

Just as it is now doing with LANL, the UC intends to manage LLNL along with Bechtel National - an engineering, construction and project management company.

According to the LANL News and Public Affairs website, LANL began a six-year effort in 2003 to make the first nuclear weapon pits - the central component for such weapons - since the Rocky Flats Plant near Boulder, Colo. shut down in June 1989. The pits are for the W88 warhead, which is carried on the Trident II D5 submarine-launched ballistic missile, "a cornerstone of the U.S. nuclear deterrent," the website stated.

While calls to the UC Office of the President seeking comment were not returned Tuesday afternoon, the UC has previously said that its continued management of the labs directly preserves national security. Quality UC research and oversight provides the needed safety in the field, it said.

According to UCSB Coalition to Demilitarize leader Darwin BondGraham, previous attempts to open a discourse between the coalition and the Regents have been met with "disinterest and open hostility," leading him to believe that more drastic measures must be taken.

"Only through a highly visible display of opposition can we build political pressure on the Regents,"

said BondGraham, a sociology and black studies graduate student.

According to a press release from the group, the UC's new mission to create nuclear pits is part of a refocus in warfare.

"The manufacturing of weapons by our university will constitute a resumption of nuclear weapons primary production, something the U.S. has not done since 1989 and something the UC hasn't done since 1949," the press release stated. "The weapons produced by UC are intended to be more usable against so-called 'rogue nations' or 'terrorists.'"

BondGraham said nuclear production at UC-managed labs contradicts the public's values.

"At a time when so many people are calling for peace, the UC will have a direct and active involvement in replenishing the nation's nuclear arsenal," BondGraham said.

Greg Mello, leader of the Los Alamos Study Group, an organization that works with the coalition, said UC professors should alert students to the pitfalls of nuclear weapons.

"More faculty leadership at UCSB [is needed] to educate students on their university's association with the creation of weapons that are immoral, and whose use or threat would be illegal under international law," Mello said.

- Kaitlin Pike contributed to this report.

FREE NewMexican

LANL: Midterm shake-up yields budget concerns

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By ANDY LENDERMAN | The New Mexican
November 26, 2006

Workers fear downsizing as new Congress prepares to take the helm

The money flowed freely a year ago -- $4.4 billion straight from the U.S. Department of Energy to employ thousands in New Mexico.

Much of that money went to Los Alamos National Laboratory. But a year and one midterm election later, it's unclear how the lab's budget will shake out in the new Congress and how many people will continue to be employed there.

The lab's new manager, Los Alamos National Security, LLC, has reported some bad news for people who work at the lab or aspire to.

Lab director Michael Anastasio expects future budgets to be relatively flat, spokesman Jeff Berger said.

But Anastasio has taken action in two areas that impact employment.

First, he announced 350 to 550 contract worker layoffs. And he told state lawmakers that he might shrink the size of the permanent work force through 400 retirements and resignations in the coming year. A reduction of 400 jobs represents a loss of about 4.8 percent of the permanent work force. The goal is to avoid layoffs.

Berger was unable to identify what areas might have fewer jobs or how the lab could be reorganized.

About 8,920 permanent employees work for Los Alamos National Security, LLC, which manages the lab for the government. Another 2,500 contractors and 1,617 students and researchers also work there.

The lab's budget is more than double what it was a few years after the Cold War. The lab's budget was $1.05 billion in the 1995 fiscal year, New Mexican archives show.

Neither of New Mexico's senators have offered specifics about the lab budget, which is about $2.2 billion in the fiscal year that recently ended.

New Mexico's senators are expected to make lab funding a major issue, but they're clearly not making any guarantees right now.

"New Mexico's two DOE laboratories play key roles in nonproliferation, homeland security, and energy security -- areas that are, and will continue to be, critical for our country," said U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M. "There is no question in my mind that adequate funding for LANL and Sandia will

remain a top priority."

U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., has authored an appropriations bill that would fund the labs and other agencies in the current Congress. But it's unclear if that bill -- the 2007 Energy and Water Appropriations Act -- will even pass this year. Instead, a new spending bill authored by a Democratic-controlled Congress might pay for future lab operations, and it might not be passed until next year.

"Sen. Domenici hopes that's not the case, but it's possible," spokesman Matt Letourneau said.

Domenici lost the chairmanship to his appropriations subcommittee when voters kicked Republicans out of power earlier this month.

"Elections have consequences," Letourneau said. He declined to elaborate.

Manny Trujillo, who heads a lab employee association, said workers are worried about a future with more emphasis on weapons manufacturing and less on research and development.

"People are afraid that there's going to be a tremendous amount of downsizing at the laboratory due to budgets and programs," Trujillo said.

For now, the lab is operating on what's known as a continuing resolution, which continues funding for a program when a fiscal year ends without a new funding bill in place.

Domenici's bill would fund the Department of Energy, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers at $31.2 billion for the coming year.

A House version of the same appropriations bill is pegged at more than $30 billion. It's unclear where the differences would be worked out between each spending proposal, even if they are considered this year.

Anastasio is trying to avoid layoffs to the permanent work force. His company faces higher costs from gross-receipts taxes, pay raises and pensions, and a management fee.

"All he's saying is that we would expect that that level of attrition would continue," Berger said of the 400 jobs. "If we elect not to replace those people, then we have a natural, relatively minor reduction in the size of the work force."

Not filling those jobs would give some room to maneuver, Berger said, "so there's not as much pressure to eliminate people through layoffs." He was unable to estimate a cost savings associated with those jobs. However, he noted that Anastasio thinks future lab budgets will remain flat and might not even cover the cost of inflation.

Berger also said that to date, 250 contractor jobs of the 350 announced have been eliminated. The lab has not yet made a decision to eliminate an additional 200 contractor jobs.

Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group said more federal dollars are not necessarily good for the state.

"Growth in the budget in the lab can't be counted upon for economic development," Mello said.

Contact Andy Lenderman at 995-3827 oralenderman@sfnewmexican.com

Comments

By Michael Calloway (Submitted: 11/26/2006 11:29 am)

Down sizing of approximately 300-400 medium to lower classed Contractors is not the answer.
Eliminating almost 28 million dollars a year will have a sound effect on the local economies.
And, what are those workers that have worked at one job for the last 15-20 years supposed
make a living at now? I am one of them, forced out of work by upper Contractor management.
Scrambling to find a comparable job before I loose everything I have. Mr.Bodman has elected
to support LANS.LLC in a futile effort. I can tell you from my past experiences since 1981,
management (Contractors as well as LANS) are grossley overpaid. And the (Buddy System)
is alive and well here. The current subcontractor (3 letters) has intimidated and brow beaten
staff as well as crafts people into them worriying about there livelyhood not the job at hand. This
breeds a very unsafe not to mention unpleasant working condition. And job over-runs, I can tell
you as of 3 months ago they were over 50 million!! I know, I ran the reports.

By Steve Cocking (Submitted: 11/26/2006 9:28 am)

Congratulations all you Democrat voters !!

Close | Print

Monday, December 4, 2006

Labs at Center of Pits Debate Again

By John Arnold

As New Mexicans weigh in this week on the National Nuclear Security Administration's new-look nuclear weapons complex, Los Alamos National Laboratory once again finds itself in the middle of a debate over if and where to put a next-generation nuclear weapons factory.

Beginning today, the nuclear security administration will conduct a series of hearings across the state on "Complex 2030," the agency's long-term vision for consolidating nuclear weapons operations and modernizing its aging Cold War arsenal with a new warhead design.

Under the plan, Los Alamos is one of five sites the agency is considering for a new plutonium center, which would churn out the round, radioactive bomb cores, or pits, needed to fuel nuclear weapons.

It's not the first time.

In 2002, LANL was one of five sites considered for a manufacturing plant called the Modern Pit Facility. But lack of congressional support doomed the proposal.

The NNSA's newest plan is also facing scrutiny on Capitol Hill, especially in light of a new plutonium study delivered to Congress last week.

The study, which determined that pits have a much longer lifespan than previously thought, has some members of New Mexico's congressional delegation questioning whether the country needs additional pit manufacturing capabilities or the new weapon design known as the reliable replacement warhead.

"I have always had serious questions as to whether the (reliable replacement warhead) program constitutes the development of new weapons, which would be counter to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. ... Now, with the added information about the longevity of pits, the (warhead) may not be necessary," said Rep. Tom Udall, D-N.M.

Both Udall and Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., called for hearings next year to determine whether the new weapon is needed.

Bingaman said regardless of what happens with the new warhead, LANL is not the best choice for a permanent facility to produce pits.

Not only does Bingaman have concerns about security and the additional nuclear waste that would be created by such a facility, but "(LANL) has always been a science lab, so it doesn't necessarily fit in with the mission of the lab," said Jude McCartin, the senator's spokesman.

Future mission

What the future holds for LANL's mission under Complex 2030 is far from clear.

The nation's last pit factory, Rocky Flats near Denver, closed in 1989, making LANL the only site in the country capable of manufacturing pits.

The lab makes a handful each year for research and the W88 warhead. The government, however, is seeking approval to increase production to 80 pits a year.

Under Complex 2030, LANL would manufacture pits for the reliable replacement

warhead until a permanent plutonium manufacturing center is built sometime in the early 2020s.

Although Los Alamos is on the short list for the permanent center, nuclear security administration officials don't think the lab is ideal because it would be more difficult to secure than other potential sites, according to Tom D'Agostino, the agency's deputy administrator for defense programs. LANL's aging facilities also present a challenge.

Complex 2030 calls for the eventual production of 125 pits a year. LANL's plutonium center, Technical Area 55, was built in the 1970s and isn't equipped to handle such a workload, D'Agostino said.

"(LANL's plutonium facility) is designed as a set of research bays and for doing work in an incremental way," D'Agostino said. "It's not laid out as a modern manufacturing plant would be laid out, so it's less than ideal."

Still, D'Agostino acknowledges that LANL's existing resources and experienced personnel make Los Alamos a site worth considering. If it is chosen to host the consolidated center, the plutonium facility would likely not be part of the laboratory, but would be managed by a separate entity, he said.

Capacity levels

The recently released plutonium aging study also raises another possibility.

What if the nuclear security administration doesn't need to produce 125 pits a year and can make do with 80 or fewer?

Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., said last week that in light of the study, "It is possible that we will not need the same level of capacity as originally proposed."

Jay Coghlan, director of the watchdog group Nuclear Watch New Mexico, thinks that if Complex 2030 requires fewer new pits, LANL is more likely to host a permanent pit manufacturing mission.

Activists say LANL's pit production future could also hinge on a political variable—funding for one of Domenici's pet projects, a new billion-dollar lab building known as the chemistry and metallurgy research facility.

The new building, already under construction, would replace a deteriorating lab Los Alamos needs for plutonium work. But the project has yet to be fully funded, and some in Congress are questioning it.

If plutonium work is going to be moved to a new consolidated site, the chemistry and metallurgy research building "will have a very limited functional lifetime," according to a budget report submitted earlier this year by Rep. David Hobson, R-Ohio. Hobson chairs the House Appropriations subcommittee that works on the Department of Energy's spending plan.

Research facility

The chemistry and metallurgy research facility only makes sense if the consolidated plutonium facility is located at Los Alamos, Hobson said. His spending plan cuts nearly all funding for the project, while Domenici is requesting $112 million.

"If we build a new production facility— that's what (chemistry and metallurgy research) is— then it becomes extremely hard to stop pit production. Since we don't need to do it for a long time, we shouldn't be investing in it," said Los Alamos Study Group director Greg Mello.

Domenici and his staff say the chemistry and metallurgy research facility will be needed

in the future regardless of where plutonium is processed, because weapons designers at Los Alamos will always need to work with plutonium on an experimental level, if not for full-scale pit production.

Last week, the Nuclear Weapons Council— a group of senior Department of Defense and DOE officials— determined after reviewing the first reliable replacement warhead designs that the program is feasible and should be pursued.

NNSA says the nation's nuclear weapons arsenal— built to fight the Cold War— is outdated and in dire need of an overhaul.

Complex 2030 and the reliable replacement warhead program aim to create a secure arsenal better suited for 21st century threats, D'Agostino said. State-of-the-art weapons technology in the replacement warhead design would prevent unauthorized use by terrorists, and a consolidated plutonium center would allow storage of bomb-grade plutonium at a single, high-security area rather than at sites scattered around the country.

Supporters also argue that the new warhead would make the arsenal less expensive, safer and easier to maintain, creating a "responsive" weapons infrastructure that would allow the government to dismantle more old weapons.

"The beautiful thing in my view about all of this is it enables us to reduce the size of the nuclear weapons stockpile and start dismantling warheads at a much faster pace than we have before," D'Agostino said.

Critics don't buy that argument.

Creating a new nuclear weapon sends the wrong message to other countries with nuclear ambitions, they say.

"It's an inopportune time to start manufacturing nuclear weapons," said the Los Alamos Study Group's Mello. "You can be sure we'll hear about it from (Iranian president) Mr. Ahmadinejad and (North Korea's) Kim Jong Il."

Complex 2030 hearings

The National Nuclear Security Administration will take comments on the scope of its environmental study on its plan to overhaul the nation's nuclear weapons complex.

Hearings are scheduled in New Mexico as follows:

- 6 to 10 p.m. today, New Mexico Tech's Macey Center, 801 Leroy Place, Socorro.
- 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and 6 to 10 p.m. Tuesday, the Albuquerque Convention Center, 401 Second St. NW, Albuquerque.
- 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Wednesday, Hilltop House Best Western, 400 Trinity Drive, Los Alamos.
- 6 to 10 p.m. Wednesday, Genoveva Chavez Community Center, 3221 Rodeo Road, Santa Fe.

For more information, visit www.complex2030peis.com.

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 SF REPORTER DEC 6-12, 2006

INFERIORITY COMPLEX

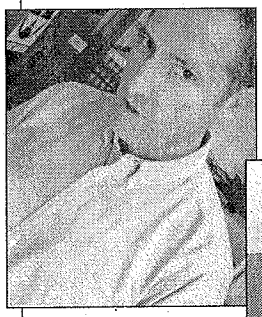
Activists speak out on nuclear future.

BY NATHAN DINSDALE
nate@sfreporter.com

"Complex 2030" sounds like a bad science-fiction movie. Something starring Kurt Russell wearing an eye patch, Vin Diesel in a pair of Ray-Bans or John Travolta sporting a terrible haircut.

Except it's worse. At least according to local anti-nuclear activists like Greg Mello, executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group.

"They're essentially proposing to replace the entire US nuclear arsenal with itself," Mello says. "Complex 2030 is supposed to be about having a smaller, more efficient arsenal, but if you want to reduce the arsenal, just retire existing weapons instead of building new ones."



Greg Mello and Joni Arends are concerned about the potential implications of Complex 2030.

Complex 2030—called "Bombplex 2030" by anti-nuclear activists—is the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) vision for the future of the US nuclear arsenal. According to the NNSA, Complex 2030 is intended to "establish a smaller, more efficient nuclear weapons complex" by developing new warheads, dismantling "retired" warheads and consolidating weapons at fewer sites.

"Complex 2030 is a broad transformation of the nuclear weapons complex," NNSA spokeswoman Julianne Smith says. "What we have now was built in the Cold War for a Cold War adversary, but our potential adversaries have evolved. This is about modernizing for the future."

New Mexico sites like Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), Sandia National Laboratory and the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in Carlsbad could be integral to the Complex 2030 vision. LANL in particular figures prominently in the Oct. 19 Notice of Intent issued by the NNSA.

"We were surprised at just how much focus is being placed on Los Alamos," Joni Arends, executive director of the Santa Fe organization Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, says. "It looks like LANL is a primary location for this proposed consolidation."

The Notice of Intent is the first step in the process. The second is hosting public hearings in communities near eight federal nuclear sites (including in Santa Fe on Dec. 6 at 6 pm at the Genoveva Chavez Community Center) to discuss NNSA plans to conduct an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in conjunction with the proposal.

"All eight of our sites would figure into Complex 2030," Smith says. "To say one is more important than another would not be right."

But those plans also include establishing a "consolidated plutonium center" for nuclear research, development and production as well as choosing a site.

"Part of this environmental process that we're going through now is picking that location," Smith says. "Currently there are five sites being considered, and Los Alamos is one of them."

The project is far from a reality. The NNSA plans to have a draft EIS ready by next summer, but a final EIS isn't expected until spring 2008. The design for the Consolidated Plutonium Center wouldn't be complete until 2012 and the facility wouldn't be operational until 2022.

"We're a long way off," Smith says. "These are just the first steps in a very long process."

Arends and Mello question whether the steps need to be taken at all. A study released last week by a group of independent scientists (called the JASON panel) also questions whether the country's aging nuclear stockpile needs to be replaced at all. According to the study, current weapons are capable of remaining effective for 100 years, more than twice the Department of Energy (DOE) estimate.

"I think the entire premise for Complex 2030 has become null and void," Arends says. "The DOE needs to go back to the drawing board and come up with a new proposal."

That isn't likely. Smith says the study won't effect NNSA plans to move forward with its plans for Complex 2030.

"There are certain infrastructure changes that we need to go forward with," Smith says, "and we have every intention of going forward with them."

1 of 1 DOCUMENT

Daily Mail (London)

December 14, 2006 Thursday

OPERATION ARMAGEDDON;
Utterly secret, it's Britain's biggest building site giving the lie to Mr Blair's pledge that there will be an open debate on nuclear weapons

BYLINE: EDWARD HEATHCOAT AMORY

SECTION: ED 1ST; Pg. 26

LENGTH: 1374 words

MOST people, if they were going to pick a spot to build the instruments of Armageddon, probably wouldn't choose suburban west Berkshire.

But that is where Britain designs and builds its nuclear bombs. Aldermaston is currently the scene of what its owners describe as the largest building programme in Britain, equivalent to the construction of Heathrow's Terminal Five. Already vast - there are more than 1,100 buildings at Aldermaston alone - it's becoming far larger.

But although the taxpayer is funding this massive project, we have no clear idea of exactly what they are doing there, or how much it is costing.

What we do know, despite official denials, is that the only plausible explanation for this hive of activity is the creation of a new generation of British nuclear bombs.

And this is interesting because the Prime Minister has assured Parliament that, in advance of the national debate that he says he wants on the successor to our Trident missile system, no decision has yet been taken on the future of our nuclear deterrent.

What evidence it is possible to deduce about the activities inside Aldermaston's closely guarded 700 acres would suggest that this Prime Ministerial declaration, like so many others before it, is misleading at best and an outright lie at worst.

Ministers say all the activity is about maintaining the current Trident warheads, but that excuse doesn't stand up to even a brief exposure to the facts.

What are they building at Aldermaston? First, they have started the construction of one of the world's most advanced lasers, the Orion project.

This will allow scientists to fire a laser, from ten different angles, at a fragment of material one millimetre across.

It will heat the fragment to three million degrees Celsius, and is 1,000 times more powerful than Aldermaston's current 'Helen' laser.

A Ministry Of Defence spokesman says: 'This replicates on a very small scale conditions that would exist at the heart of a nuclear detonation.' Our bomb-builders need this piece of equipment because we have signed the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. We can no longer do real tests on new nuclear bombs, so scientists have to find other ways to try out new ideas in bomb-making.

The second piece of equipment required is a hydrodynamic testing facility.

This looks at the behaviour of plutonium and other such material under the impact of massive blasts of high explosives, and replicates the information that would in the past have been gathered from underground tests.

The Atomic Weapons Establishment, the private company which operates Aldermaston, says that it plans the 'construction of a new hydrodynamics research facility, known as the Core Punch Facility'.

This, according to a leading American nuclear scientist, **Greg Mello,** is really useful only if you are trying to design a new nuclear bomb.

Next, our bomb-makers need computers, so that they can simulate the effects of their new nuclear bombs in virtual reality, now that they are no longer allowed to test them for real.

Aldermaston has just installed Blue Oak, a supercomputer capable of three trillion calculations per second.

This year an order was placed for the Larch computer which, if it is now in operation, would be the most powerful computing device in Western Europe.

And if that isn't enough, then consider that Aldermaston, which already employs 4,000 people, has within the past year recruited 90 scientists, 250 engineers and numerous technicians. And it plans to recruit another 700 staff in the next two years.

These new people are being told clearly what they are coming to Berkshire to do: build a bomb.

Clive Marsh, AWE's chief scientist, says that he and his colleagues work to give Britain 'the ability to provide a new nuclear warheadmost of our research is conducted in this capability area'.

On top of all this, AWE is also building - or planning to build - office blocks to accommodate all the new recruits, a new facility for uranium component manufacturing and further manufacturing facilities for the non-nuclear parts of the bomb.

It is also planning an entire new complex for handling the high explosives that set off the plutonium in the bomb, and a new facility for extracting tritium, a vital radioactive

material of which are stocks are gradually diminishing. On a separate site, at Burghfield, seven miles away from Aldermaston, AWE is planning yet another complex, this time to assemble the new bombs.

The Government continues to insist that all of this work is necessary merely to maintain the current Trident warheads, but no one believes it.

What we do know is that the warheads of nuclear bombs gradually decay, as the plutonium 'pits' at their core get helium bubbles in them and become brittle.

No one really knows what happens when the pits become corrupted in this way, and a former chief scientific adviser to the Government wrote: 'Plutonium, as metal, wasn't known to mankind until 50-odd years ago. So we only have 50 years of data.' As an extra twist, experts believe that Britain and the U.S.

are both looking at new kinds of nuclear bombs, with smaller payloads, which could more easily be used as battlefield 'tactical nukes', an option that both governments officially deny considering.

In America, the Bush administration has concluded that new bombs are required, and within the next few weeks Congress is due to decide between two possible designs for a Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW).

Once America switches to a new system, Britain will be effectively obliged to do so as well, as our nuclear programme is almost entirely dependent on the U.S.

But because of international nuclear treaties, we can't simply buy the new bombs from the U.S.

- we have to make our own.

Which would explain why British and American scientists are collaborating on 16 joint working groups, and why, in 2004 alone, AWE staff made 180 visits to 29 U.S.

nuclear establishments, while U.S.

scientists made 128 visits to Aldermaston. The Berkshire facility is actually run by Don Cook, an American nuclear scientist.

So, given that Aldermaston is now the site of a secret and massive project to build a new British nuclear warhead, what will it cost us? A senior Whitehall source told me that over time, the most expensive bit of an independent British nuclear deterrent is maintaining the capability to manufacture our own warheads.

But since 1992, the Government hasn't published figures revealing even the annual cost of the nuclear deterrent, let alone its component parts.

We can see that spending on Aldermaston is rising. Last year, the Government announced a Pounds 1 billion three-year boost to its funding. In 2003, it had committed Pounds 5.3 billion over 25 years.

The White Paper on our nuclear future, which came out last month, claimed that Aldermaston would cost up to 3 per cent of the defence budget, which works out at about Pounds 100million a year.

But no one is seriously pretending that this will even begin to cover all the costs associated with its huge expansion programme.

Costain, the construction giant currently doing some work for AWE in Berkshire, recently told City analysts that the building programme alone at Aldermaston will cost Pounds 12 billion over 12 years.

One way of working out what it will really cost is to look at what the U.S., which is more open about such matters, spends on similar facilities.

Its equivalent to our laser system has cost Pounds 2 billion and rising. Its computer facilities cost Pounds 300 million a year. Its uranium production line costs Pounds 500 million, and its material science facility another Pounds 500million.

Whatever the exact numbers, there is little doubt that reproducing all this in Berkshire is going to be extremely expensive, and that the Government would prefer the facts are never made public.

Given the vast costs, and complex moral considerations, of a replacement for Trident, all this needs the kind of public debate that the Government has promised but clearly doesn't plan to deliver.

Nuclear bombs are different, and in a democratic country we deserve a proper discussion about their construction and use.

And at the centre of that discussion must be the giant construction project in Berkshire that the Government is attempting to conceal from public scrutiny.

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Reforming the weapons complex

◆ *Defense Science Board task force calls for new National Nuclear Weapons Agency to replace NNSA*

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A new report on issues related to the current nuclear stockpile said there was no perfect structure for the nuclear weapons program. Rather the document claimed to formulate a "better balance" of "competing considerations" than the current arrangement.

The report by a task force of the Defense Science Board went well beyond the reforms called for in the Department of Energy's two most recent independent studies for consolidating and restructuring how the nation does its nuclear weapons business.

In a series of recommendations the task force agreed with a number of new initiatives underway in the National Nuclear Security Administration, like the Reliable Replacement Warhead. The RRW is an emerging strategy for developing what are billed as cheaper, better, more up-to-date nuclear weapons to replace the current post-Cold War inventory.

At the same time, the report held out little hope for reform within the current NNSA/DOE structure. It explored some advantages of moving NNSA directly under the Department of Defense but concluded that the "unique phenomena and the extreme physical regimes involved in nuclear explosions," goes beyond the experience of senior-level DOD managers and ultimately calls for an "independent view."

Since neither DOE nor DOD alone are adequate overseers, the task force proposed what it called a government corporation, the National Nuclear Weapons

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Agency, with an administrator reporting to the President through a Board of Directors composed of the Secretaries of Defense (the chair), Energy, Homeland Security and the Director of National Intelligence.

The report was premised on what it found to be "a need for a national consensus on the nature and role of nuclear weapons, as well as a new approach to sustaining a reliable, safe, secure and credible nuclear stockpile," as Committee Chairman William Schneider Jr. wrote in his transmittal letter.

The report held out little hope for reform within the current NNSA/DOE structure.

Any reform can only succeed by uprooting an entrenched and influential perspective that reforming the complex is fundamentally the wrong direction to go to increase security and reduce nuclear weapons proliferation, the authors argued.

Among their dozen or so major recommendations was the suggestion that the national security leadership should "declare unequivocally and frequently, that a reliable, safe, secure and credible nuclear deterrent is essential to national security and a continuing high priority."

In addition, the board called for planning a design life of 20-25 years for weapons systems, which in turn would involve "underground nuclear testing available as needed to verify proper operation of the original design and any significant subsequent changes."

New Mexico's two U.S. senators, who are about to exchange places as chair and ranking member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, were still studying the report this week.

Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., the outgoing committee chair was briefed on the classified version of the study some time ago. His spokesman Matt Letourneau said Domenici thought the task force was "well put together and well versed and much of what they had to say made sense," Domenici has been frustrated at times by NNSA but believes the agency has taken some positive steps lately and hasn't decided that, "we are at the end of our rope."

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., the new committee chair, voted against the bill that established the NNSA in the first place, noted his spokeswoman Jude McCartin, so he is unlikely to support a proposal that would take it even farther out of DOE and further isolate it.

The report has met with a range of criticism among what it termed the "entrenched opposition."

Hans Kristensen, an analyst for the Federation of American Scientist turned the term "entrenched" back on those involved in the study, concluding that there were no new ideas.

"This is perhaps not surprising considering that the entire DSB Task Force consisted of people from the nuclear labs, major defense contractors and conservative think tanks," he wrote on the Strategic Security Blog. "Some were even the architects of the 2001 Nuclear Posture Review."

Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group said the report was more accurate than many people might think about the problems surrounding the nuclear weapons complex, but he characterized the task force as "cold war ideologues, neo-conservatives and interested industry" - well to the right even of most nuclear weapons people.

"This is a desperate, even a fanatical report, but it is also dangerous," he said, "because the weapons complex is troubled and people don't want to think too much about it."

He added, "The real problem they are trying to solve is running the nuclear warhead enterprise against public opinion and international treaties, but the problem is unsolvable in its current form because there is no consensus to sustain it."

An appendix to the task force that lists the participation of senior defense and nuclear weapons officials including then-Director of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and current Los Alamos National Laboratory Director Michael Anastasio, along with other national laboratory representatives.

Rich Wagner of LANL, a senior nuclear weapon official in the Pentagon during the Reagan era was also a member of the task force.

Briefings conducted between April and August of 2005, were given by Brian Fearey, a senior LANL Advisor on National Security Strategy on "Enterprise Modeling – Lab Developed Tools; and by John McClelland on LANL "Transformation Perspectives."

URL: http://www.abqjournal.com/north/opinion/523738northoped12-24-06.htm

Sunday, December 24, 2006

Nuclear Situation Worsens, Aims for the Pits

By Greg Mello
Executive director of the Albuquerque-based Los Alamos Study Group

OTHER VOICES: It's an eerie moment in U.S. nuclear history. Policy teeters on a knife-edge between disarmament and rearmament, but silence largely reigns. The attention of policy-makers, the public, the nonprofit community and the foundations that largely fund and direct them has not caught up with events, leaving the real policy decisions chiefly in the hands of autonomous, largely unconscious, nuclear bureaucracies.

The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) hopes to begin producing plutonium warhead cores— or pits— late next year at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). If that happens, it will be the first time the U.S. has produced pits in 18 years. With new pits, the production of new warheads can also restart, lighting up all 10 warhead factories, labs, and NNSA administrative centers with new work and a fresh sense of importance.

Of course these events will echo around the world, reinforcing those who say their nation too should have nuclear weapons. Security will decline for everyone.

Without new pits and the new production that goes with them, the warhead enterprise faces serious internal crises related to an aging work force, declining practical skills, poor morale, and a fading ideological commitment to nuclear weapons, among other problems. The apparent social consensus that once supported U.S. WMD in the face of bedrock moral values and sound safety, fiscal, and environmental practices has long evaporated.

For at least the next 16 years or so, only Los Alamos will make pits. Yet despite the expenditure of $2.5 billion here so far on pit production, numerous problems remain— including serious safety and infrastructure deficiencies. To review some of these problems, look under "LANL" at the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB) Web site, www.dnfsb.gov.

The DNFSB has no enforcement powers and relies on voluntary compliance, Congress, and knowledgeable public outcry to keep LANL and other sites safe. Unfortunately NNSA is in the process of implementing a contractor "self-monitoring" system at LANL which is virtually guaranteed, in our view, to produce accidents. One of NNSA's stated goals is to overcome what it perceives as a "risk-averse" culture in order to "get the job done."

The situation is grotesque. The U.S. has almost 10,000 nuclear warheads and bombs. Thousands are backups, part of a multi-tiered redundancy that puts the "assured" in "mutual assured destruction." This is too many even for President Bush, who wants to drop the arsenal to 6,000 by 2012.

Behind the backups and the backups' backups are extra pits, 13,000 or so of them stored at the Pantex warhead assembly plant near Amarillo.

Pits last a long time. Results of long-awaited accelerated aging studies show that all the pits in the U.S. arsenal have at least six decades of "service" left.

So why make them? Aside from the need to create "end-to-end" work so the enterprise can feed and sustain itself, the other reason for pit production is that even a small production line allows the prompt,

"responsive" production of "boutique" warheads that might be needed for special occasions.

This is not solely a Bush administration idea. In 1999, when the Democrats were running the show and Bill Richardson was Secretary of Energy, Congress got a detailed briefing on the idea.

As pit production moves toward startup, some $2 billion in new LANL plutonium-related facilities is also in the works. The flagship project is a $1 billion pit production annex called the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) facility, but several other projects are also involved. NNSA hopes these projects will increase LANL's pit production capacity enough to build large numbers of new warheads over a multi-decade period, including "small builds of special weapons."

The CMRR, widely understood to commit NNSA to pit production at LANL indefinitely, is controversial in Congress. The Republican-led House Appropriations Committee wants to kill the project, calling it "irrational" and "stupid." Republican Pete Domenici promotes it.

What's eerie is the silence from the arms control community, the Democrats and the public. Public testimony at Complex 2030 scoping hearings, however heartfelt, is irrelevant to policy decisions— and doubly irrelevant as regards pit production at LANL.

Some arms controllers and Democrats actually want a little pit production at LANL; others simply don't know what's going on. Public debate is led away from these sensitive subjects by powerful foundations, by peer pressure within the nonprofit community, and by career concerns. Most churches fear losing members and contributions.

Practically speaking, the New Mexico congressional delegation holds veto power, should they choose to exert it, over pit production at LANL and the new CMRR pit factory. They need to hear from us in clear, specific terms: stop pit production before it starts, and cut funding for the CMRR.

Mello is executive director of the Albuqerque-based Los Alamos Study Group.