



Los Alamos Study Group

Nuclear Disarmament • Environmental Protection • Social Justice • Economic Sustainability

It is critical to stop warhead core (“pit”) production, and we can.

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- Pit production is not needed to maintain each and every warhead and bomb in the U.S. arsenal until at least 2060 if not longer. There is a pit in each of the almost 10,000 warheads and bombs in the current arsenal and there are at least 13,000 extra pits. Bush has promised to dismantle ~ 4,000 warheads and bombs. There are many forms of redundancy built into the U.S. nuclear posture.
- There are legally-binding, widely-recognized obligations to achieve nuclear abolition intertwined with the world’s nonproliferation treaties and regimes.
- Several big polls show that at least 80% of the American public supports full nuclear disarmament pursuant to treaty.
- LANL is the *only* place in the U.S. where plutonium warhead cores (“pits”) can be made for at least the next 15 years or more. Most (not all) new warheads require new pits. Hence LANL is pivotal in whether or not the U.S. resumes nuclear weapon production after the current 18-year pause.
- Ominously, the first two kinds of pits to be made are for the Trident missile system. The bulk of these pits, and the new warheads to be made from them, are for a warhead shell for which an ultra-high-accuracy variant already has been designed, built, and tested, ostensibly for “conventional” warheads for “prompt global strike.”
- If pit production can be postponed just a few years, global security imperatives, increasingly obvious even in the U.S., may allow a sober reassessment of pit production benefits and costs. Ideological commitment may wane as “Cold Warriors” retire. Superfluous skills will disappear, facilities will age, and fiscal realities will press, all making gratuitous, aggressive pit and warhead production less likely.
- Failure to resume production would realistically lower the status of the nuclear weapons enterprise in the U.S., reducing the legitimacy and appeal of an aggressive nuclear posture and allowing decisionmakers time and reason to disinvest in nuclear weapons.
- In theory, LANL can make pits now and is planning to do so this year. LANL may or may not be able to do so in actual practice. And it can only do so at a low rate, by breaking internal safety rules, driving a reluctant workforce, and building “work-arounds” to temporarily fix various infrastructure deficiencies.
- Key members of Congress already oppose adding new production capacity at LANL. Last month, construction of the larger of two new pit production buildings appears to have been deferred for a year pending other decisions.
- If new production capacity is acquired by LANL – through new construction, gradual expansion of existing capacity, or both – there would be serious consequences. Preventing proliferation and arms races would be much harder. Look –
 - More production capacity if acquired would be used – indeed *must* be used to be proven. Pit production would begin in earnest and overall U.S. warhead manufacture would then resume with very serious ramifications worldwide.
 - The pits made would very likely be for a new generation of warheads, possibly including disclosed or undisclosed “small builds” of “special weapons.” There is little or no interest in building extra copies of warheads slated for dismantlement!

- Since these new weapons would be untested, the U.S. would be unlikely to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). In that case, few if any other key states would ratify, and the CTBT would not enter into force.
- Adding renewed U.S. warhead design and production to many other powerful negative factors already present would make it likely that *all* efforts by *all* parties to strengthen the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) would fail, further weakening restraint over nuclear anarchy.
- Making a new generation of U.S. warheads and bombs would help legitimate nuclear weapons worldwide and stimulate a variety of responsive investments in other countries, all driven or protected by U.S. hypocrisy. Fresh U.S. commitments to nuclear weapons would poison restraint and empower hard-liners worldwide in a complex manner very hard to control.
- Russia in particular would continue to modernize and invest in its nuclear forces for this and other potent reasons.
- Pit production would have big implications for New Mexico – some new, some continuing.
 - LANL would become primarily a production site as the exigencies of pit production take over lab funding and culture. Its reputation would reflect that. Even without accidents, a “plutonium” identity and reputation would come to be shared to some extent throughout the Santa Fe metropolitan area and Northern New Mexico. Already the Santa Fe metro area is home to a growing, unregulated nuclear waste dump, by far the largest in New Mexico and the largest in a four-state area. Most of the new waste is generated by pit production and related programs.
 - This would affect the area’s culture and quality of life directly and it would harm the area’s economic development potential, currently based in substantial part on perceptions of environmental amenity.
 - These impacts would combine with the regional impacts of global warming (including long-term drought, dramatic ecological changes triggered by drought spikes, significant loss of stream flow and water supplies, and the loss of most skiing), as well as with a variety of social problems, almost certain to increase for other reasons. All these problems would be negatively synergistic.
 - New Mexico’s political system would continue its subaltern relationship with New Mexico’s nuclear laboratories, uranium enrichment plant, waste disposal sites, and with various nuclear contractors, some of whom are now campaigning to bring additional nuclear facilities (mostly waste-oriented) to New Mexico.
 - If the state’s politicians continue to depend on nuclear and defense thinking and contractors, they will continue to ignore realistic solutions to the state’s economic, social, and environmental problems. These leaders, some powerful, will also (continue to) forestall development of sound *national* energy and climate policies.
 - “Plutonium-induced” changes in the state’s identity, culture, reputation, and politics would lower the barriers to more nuclear investments in a downward spiral, further investing the state in injustice, unsustainability, and continuing to stunt its democratic institutions.
- Finally, pit production has been very difficult for DOE and NNSA to achieve, in part because it is utterly unnecessary and in part because it is so hard, dangerous, dirty, and expensive. Six plans have failed since 1988. Either Senator Bingaman or Congressman Udall could stop this relatively easily if they wanted to do so, given other realities. Senator Domenici is the main congressional force behind expanded pit production at LANL.