

Will LANL's weapons production mission succeed – and why should it?

LANL's new plutonium "pit" mission, with its vast costs, risks, and impacts, is already obsolete, years before construction will be completed.

Nobel Prize winning physicist I. I. Rabi, upon arriving at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) in 1983, called the lab an "abomination." Peggy Pond Church, accomplished local author and poet, called it "the worst thing that ever happened to New Mexico." LANL is a controversial place to work, to say the least!

Yet never in its (at best checkered) history has LANL undertaken a greater folly, by *its own lights*, than attempting to add a dangerous, round-the-clock manufacturing mission to its already-bloated workload.

Making plutonium "pits" for nuclear weapons on an industrial basis is a mission that LANL itself, from 1946 until recently, never wanted.

This ad and others in this series tell the story of that folly, which we believe will come to be regretted by all parties.

Building the proposed LANL pit factory is a huge endeavor. In constant dollars, it will cost 20 times what was spent during the Manhattan Project in New Mexico. If all goes "well," the result will be a temporary, jerry-rigged factory in an old building with substandard safety systems, for a mission which is at best no longer needed. We particularly hope LANL employees will come to understand this folly, avoid it if possible, and report problems before (more) people get hurt.

People do get hurt.

McClatchy newspapers found that by mid-2015, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) had paid death benefits to the families of 1,599 LANL workers. Total benefits paid to sick and dead LANL workers and their families now exceed \$1.3 billion (B). DOL actuaries predict total discounted payouts to LANL worker and families will reach \$27 B by 2079.

The [Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety] Board reviewed [LANL's plutonium safety analysis] and determined that it depends on assumptions that cannot be technically verified and are some times non-conservative....[and] may not protect public safety. (DNFSB, Oct. 2025)

done" without questioning *why* it should be done. LANL pit production, especially, is make-work. As one Pentagon analyst put it, "A dollar spent on pit production at LANL, beyond demonstration and training, is a dollar wasted." We certainly hope you don't think your work helps "keep America safe." It doesn't.

The fallacious need for new pits

All U.S. nuclear weapons use a "small" atomic bomb to trigger a larger explosion. The core of that atomic "trigger" is a hollow "pit" made of plutonium and other materials. There is no need – *and there are no plans* – to make pits to life-extend any of the 3,700 nuclear warheads and bombs in the active U.S. arsenal. There are also several thousand extra pits available for reuse as desired. Standing up a reliable factory for new pits, which is underway in South Carolina, will take until at

Lab officials have repeatedly said they do not want the laboratory to become a bomb production or plutonium processing facility because of the worker safety and environmental hazards that would be involved. (*Santa Fe New Mexican*, 1993)

"All routine production and testing should be farmed out... The hastily designed and built plant is not satisfactory from [a] point of view of health or of permanency, and it is not likely that it can be adequately staffed and operated as [a] production unit at such a place as Los Alamos. (Norris Bradbury, LANL Director, 1946)

Choose work that actually benefits humanity

NNSA recently reported that 800-900 staff leave LANL each year. A few retire and some are fired, but most leave voluntarily. If you work at LANL, we hope you will join them.

In the meantime, consider the emptiness of the slogans used by LANL's grossly overpaid managers to prop up morale and "get the job

least 2032, with production in 2035 at the earliest. This schedule puts nuclear knickers in a twist.

Why? Under the rubric of "modernization," the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) wants to make various new kinds of warheads as fast as possible. This provides work to the contractors who do 98% (no joke) of NNSA's work. It provides "missions" and jobs to the 65,500 employees at the nuclear labs and production sites. The work of designing and making new warheads trains new staff and provides pork-barrel spending in congressional districts.

Feeding contractors

In other words "the mission," in agency parlance, largely boils down to feeding the contractors. Absent new warheads, what will all these people – about half of whom have been hired in the last five years -- do?

But in a news release this week, Domenici, R-N.M., suggested Los Alamos is not the right spot for the pit plant... (*Abq Journal*, 2002)

To the greatest extent possible, NNSA wants to provide these new warheads with new pits. There is no compelling technical need to do so -- in fact, all the new and modified warheads and bombs to be made in the 2020s will use recycled pits. Even in the 2030s, more than half the new warheads on NNSA's docket will use recycled pits.

This includes "about half" the W87-1 warheads for which LANL was supposed to supply all the pits, according to recent public remarks by Dr. Jill Hruby, Biden's NNSA chief. This is LANL's only known new-pit job. **Why then could not ALL the pits LANL is supposed to produce be replaced by recycled pits, a strategy which NNSA itself has said would cost just "1%" as much as using new pits?** The reason recycling was not chosen in the first place, again according to NNSA, is that it would not create an immediate "need" for a pit factory!

Stepping back, why is there even any "need" for this new warhead at all? The answer, according to a White House official some years ago, is that LANL's sister lab in Livermore "needs" a new warhead to maintain employment. We can add that absent the W87-1 warhead, a project enabled by LANL pits, the entire NNSA warhead complex would have too little work to justify its recently-expanded size. Again, it's all about feeding the contractors. And if the contractors aren't fed, Congress is unhappy. Yes, it's that corrupt.

Why LANL? Speed, supposedly, and greed

From 1948 until 2018, no federal decision supported pit manufacturing at Los Alamos on any but a small scale. DOE and NNSA decisions to limit LANL pit production to at most 20 pits per year were made after extensive public input in 1996, 1999, 2008, 2008, 2009, and April 2018. Twenty pits per year is too few to support a new warhead.

All that changed in 2018. That May, President Trump's new NNSA chief took the advice of senators Udall, Heinrich, and other hawks and reversed 70 years of prior policy. She declared, without support from any federal study, that LANL was to henceforth make at least 30 pits per year (average: ~41)

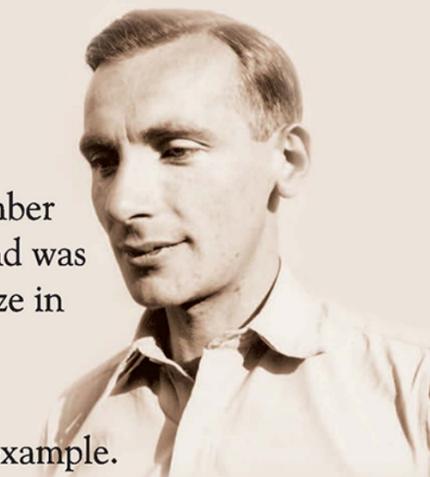
"Remember your humanity, and forget the rest."

In memory of

Sir Joseph Rotblat
(1908 - 2005)

He left Los Alamos in December 1944 for conscience's sake and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1995 for decades of nuclear disarmament leadership.

May many others follow his example.



Bingaman said regardless of what happens with the new warhead, LANL is not the best choice for a permanent facility to produce pits. (*Abq Journal*, 2006)

for the U.S. stockpile starting in 2026, with surge capacity for many more.

What was billed in FY18 as a \$3 B acquisition that would be complete by this fiscal year has by now burned \$10 B, with seven years yet to go. The speed with which LANL could supposedly start production did not materialize. Costs after 2018 will be \$28 B in all, 9 times what was estimated in that year. If all goes according to plan, each LANL pit will cost roughly \$100 million, as much as a large high school or a small hospital.

NNSA has estimated that LANL pit production will require full-time work from 4,105 staff members. This is roughly twice the staffing level that will be required at the South Carolina plant, which by itself will be able to do the whole pit mission. **Why build the LANL pit factory at all?**

LANL pits enable a dangerous arms race

The W87-1 warhead, for which LANL pits are to be made, would augment the approximately 534 modern W87-0 warheads which will be available to deploy on 400 to 450 deployed Sentinel ICBMs, if that gigantic program goes forward at full scale.

Sentinel is on track to cost more than \$200 B in current dollars, and faces serious real estate and construction challenges. Many, including a significant minority fraction of

Congress, believe it is a destabilizing weapon and should not be built for that reason alone. When fiscal responsibility returns to Washington, as it some day must if the U.S. continues to exist, Sentinel may be downsized or canceled.

Dr. Hruby said it was W78 pits which would be recycled for the W87-1. Open sources imply there are approximately 776 W78 pits. If all these were used to make W87-1 warheads, and even if no new pits were made at LANL or anywhere else, in principle there would still be 1,260 highly-accurate, modern warheads available for Sentinel ICBMs in 2050.

Pits slowly age, but none of these pits will be "wearing out" soon. (And if they were, LANL's facilities would not have the capacity to replace them.)

Some may question whether new warheads made with W78 pits could be certified as reliable without nuclear testing. Dr. Hruby evidently thinks so. Powerful surrogate testing techniques, including the use of less-fissile plutonium 242 in full-scale dummy warheads, are available. Nuclear explosive testing is not needed.

At present, the U.S. deploys 400 warheads on older ICBMs. More cannot be deployed under the limits of the New START treaty without subtracting warheads from another weapon system. New START expires on Feb. 5, 2026. Russia has suggested that the U.S. extend the numerical limits of the treaty for another year, to give time for negotiations. President Trump has not replied.

So even without new pits, the U.S. could eventually triple the number of warheads on its ICBMs, but only if New START expires and no new treaties were negotiated to limit strategic nuclear weapons. Right now, the United States could double the number of warheads on its ICBMs without making any new warheads or any new pits. Again, this could only be done in contravention of New START limits.

LANL pit production, if it ever happens, would be the icing on a very dangerous cake. Don't assume Triad, NNSA, and Trump know what they are doing. They don't.

*

LET'S WORK TOGETHER TO STOP NUCLEAR WEAPONS

We seldom ask for financial support. NOW is the time of year in which we must do so!

Since 1989 the Los Alamos Study Group community – our staff and board, volunteers, interns, and supporters – has consistently provided leadership on nuclear weapons issues in New Mexico and nationally. Our work includes research, scholarship, and writing, education and lobbying of nuclear decision makers in Washington, providing an information clearinghouse for journalists, local organizing, litigating, and advertising. To the extent funding allows, we are not just a "think tank" but also an "action tank."

We have a long history of successes in defeating, delaying, and legally constraining nuclear weapons projects including plutonium pit production, running back to the early 1990s.

The Study Group is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. All donations are fully tax-deductible. Candid (formerly Guidestar) has given us its highest "Platinum" rating for transparency. **We are entirely non-partisan.**

Examples of what more resources could fund include: more ads like this one, drive-time radio spots, billboards, and targeted mailings; local organizing and national outreach augmented by visiting activists and students; paid internships and staff.

More than ever we need, as Einstein said, "active participation in the fight against war and everything that leads to it." Opinion is not enough.

When we participate in the fight against war and nuclear weapons, something fresh and new is born. We leave behind the war culture, which has used our

passivity as permission. We join a community of resistance and renewal. We in New Mexico have a uniquely powerful location at the center of the U.S. nuclear warhead complex. **In the fight against nuclear weapons and war, we in New Mexico have the privilege – and the responsibility – of proximity.**

There are many ways to contribute. You can mail a check (*our address is below*) or securely contribute on-line at <https://lasg.org/contribute.htm>, where you can also see other ways to give. **Thank you!**

Other ways you can help turn the tide:

- **Scan this QR code** or go to stopthebomb.org to endorse and join the more than 1,200 individual and 270 business and organizational endorsers of the "Call for Sanity, not Nuclear Production";
- **Recruit more organizations, businesses, religious organizations and individuals.** Start with your friends and contacts. Show them this ad or previous ads at <https://lasg.org/LASG-ads.html>.
- **Write letters to newspaper editors, elected officials, and other community leaders expressing your opposition to LANL's wasteful and destructive pit factory.** Get the word out as publicly as possible!

• **Sign up for email bulletins. Send a blank email to lasg-subscribe@lists.riseup.net.** Learn about on-line trainings, local meetings, and special events. **Thank you for your support!**

Los Alamos Study Group, 2901 Summit Pl NE, ABQ, NM 87106
<https://lasg.org>

