nuclear watch new mexico

The Case Against Los Alamos Lab's CMRR-"Nuclear Facility"

Unfinished Design and Cost Estimates

The Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) Project at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) will be the keystone to an expanded nuclear weapons complex production complex. Located next door to the Lab's existing plutonium pit production plant, the two facilities would be interconnected via underground tunnel, and share a vault capable of holding up to six metric tons of plutonium. The proposed Nuclear Facility will be larger than the old CMR Building and will enable a larger production capacity. The design of the CMRR-"Nuclear Facility" is around 50% complete, and the estimated costs for the entire project have exploded almost ten-fold from $660 million in 2004 when first proposed to Congress to nearly $6 billion and climbing today. Final estimated costs will not be known until design is 90% complete, which is planned for late 2012. **Funding anything beyond design at this point is premature.**

Incomplete Justifications

Explanations on the need for the new facility still lack critical details**.** Current CMR missions could be moved to CMRR's already completed $400 million first phase and LANL's existing plutonium pit production facility, rather than the CMRR's second phase, the ~$5.5 billion "Nuclear Facility." But the Lab refuses to perform related analyses despite thousands of requests to do so during the recent Environmental Impact Statement process.

The CMRR-NF will enable the number of plutonium "pits"— the fissile cores of modern nuclear warheads — the Lab can produce, to increase from the current 10-20 per year to 50-80 per year. But, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) and the Pentagon have yet to justify increased production rates when the United States is reducing the number of nuclear warheads. It is undetermined how many (if any) pits the US will require when construction of the CMRR is complete. The Nuclear Facility won't begin operating until 2024 at the earliest, when the size of and requirements for U.S. nuclear forces could be significantly different and likely reduced.

It is unknown how much of the CMRR Project's estimated costs of almost $6 billion are due to LANL overhead. Los Alamos National Security, LLC, comprised of Bechtel National, the University of California, Babcock & Wilcox and URS, has managed the Lab since 2006. DOE documents demonstrate Lab overhead is very near 50% of total costs. Most of the increased cost of the CMRR is due to trying to build the Nuclear Facility in a complex seismic fault zone between a rift valley and a dormant supervolcano, compounded by overhead on that. Building the CMRR-NF at LANL is a very expensive proposition. **Who profits and why is the CMRR-NF needed at any cost must be re-examined.**

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Undecided Options

A recent final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) still leaves undecided whether to use a "Deep Excavation" or "Shallow Excavation" Option for construction of the Nuclear Facility, which was the only choice of substance the NNSA offered (and not a true alternative since it still assumes the construction of the Nuclear Facility). We suspect that NNSA rushed the final SEIS so that it could perhaps have a freer hand in using its FY 2012 budget to begin massive site preparation that could cost ~3/4 billion dollars. **Congress should bar construction startup (including major site pre-construction) until NNSA provides credible estimated total costs.**

Unneeded Expanded Production Capacity

The United States does not need to produce 50-80 new plutonium pits per year. NNSA first proposed the CMRR project while it was developing new-design "Reliable Replacement Warheads" (RRWs) that would have required new pits. In 2008 Congress rejected RRWs and NNSA has failed ever since to make a convincing case why it needs expanded pit production. NNSA's push for increased production also began when it believed pits might only last 45-60 years. The latest science indicates they are reliable for at least 85-100 years, and probably more. In addition, seven of the eight warhead types in the stockpile are in or will soon undergo major Life Extension Programs (LEPs) to extend their service life by 30 years without the CMRR-NF.

The Obama Administration's April 2010 Nuclear Posture Review endorsed the Nuclear Facility but did not mandate increased pit production. It did state that new nuclear weapons production facilities "will be put in place to surge production in the event of significant geopolitical 'surprise'," intended to serve as a hedge against a resurgent Russia or an emboldened China. But this is outdated, Cold War-era thinking. **Moreover, expanded plutonium pit production will not deter nuclear-armed terrorists; the most likely catastrophic threat the United States faces.**

The Need for New Jobs Not Addressed

America desperately needs more employment, but despite an estimated taxpayer investment of near $6 billion the CMRR Project will create zero new permanent jobs. Instead, it will simply relocate already existing Lab jobs from one location to another. At best, the CMRR-Nuclear Facility will average 410 temporary construction jobs over nine years, or nearly $15 million per job. Imagine if $6 billion was put into job creators such as renewable energies and protecting the Rio Grande by cleaning up LANL's extensive contamination!

Stopping CMRR construction would save $100 million this year and more in future years. A decision not to build the CMRR-Nuclear Facility could save $3-5 billion. Not expanding plutonium pit production—an unneeded, provocative step—could save tens of billions of dollars over the next half-century.

Sources: CMRR-Nuclear Facility Supplemental EIS, NNSA, August 2011; NNSA FY12 Congressional Budget Request; NNSA FY12 SSM Plan; House and Senate FY12 Energy and Water Appropriations reports; SNM Consolidation Business Case, NNSA, December 2007; US DOE FY09 "Functional Support Costs;" "Pit Lifetime," JSR-06-335, JASONs, The Mitre Corporation, January 11, 2007. *October 12, 2011*

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