



## Nuclear Watch New Mexico

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### SAFETY BOARD SAYS GOVT. NOT READY FOR NEW LANL CONTRACT

Santa Fe, NM - The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB), an independent safety board chartered by Congress, states that the federal government is not ready for the new management contract for the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL).

The bid award announcement is expected by December 1 and the bidding process itself has been underway more than two years. During that time, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) has reduced its federal oversight and plans to further reduce it while relying on increased Laboratory oversight of itself. This is despite past scandals, security and safety infractions and a prolonged standdown to operations that cost taxpayers 100's of millions of dollars. Moreover, instead of being prepared in advance, the NNSA's Los Alamos Site Office (LASO) plans on a 3-month "strategic pause" in order to "reboot" itself after the contract is awarded.

Jay Coghlan, Director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, commented, "There's no excuse for the government to not be ready for contract transition, and it's baffling that federal oversight would be reduced at this critical point. Given past Lab history the federal government is taking the wrong direction entirely if it allows the new contractor increased oversight over itself. That's fake oversight which should be immediately reversed."

Key points from three weekly DNFSB reports are in italics below.

#### DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

SUBJECT: Los Alamos Report for Week Ending October 28, 2005

NNSA Oversight: LASO has issues that hamper effective oversight and is not ready to manage contract transition or the new contract (e.g., site rep weeklies 9/23/05, 8/26/05). To get ready, LASO plans to enter a 3-month strategic pause in parallel with the first half of contract transition (i.e., Dec 2005 - Feb 2006), during which LASO would perform an organizational reboot by re-analyzing staffing needs, re-engineering key processes, and formalizing policies, procedures, training, and qualification. Detailed planning for the pause will occur during the next 2 to 3 weeks.

LANL would continue to operate during the pause, but LANL processes require LASO interaction and oversight. The first 3 months of contract transition is especially pivotal to ensuring not only that the new contractor starts out right but also that management and personnel stay focused on continued safe operation. LASO plans to have a small "continuity team" (e.g., ~10-20 people) focused on essential interaction. LASO also intends to rely on increased

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LANL oversight to compensate for decreased federal oversight during the pause, which would include cutting back on most deployed facility reps. LANL oversight and assessment processes unfortunately also have issues, and LANL appears inclined to wait and let the new contractor make improvements. Overall, it does not appear that NNSA has analyzed and understood the risks and the required risk mitigation associated with this pause, nor does it appear that corporately NNSA has systematically evaluated alternatives to the pause, such as bringing in an external federal assist team to facilitate LASO improving operations at this critical juncture.

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

SUBJECT: Los Alamos Report for Week Ending September 23, 2005

NNSA Oversight: LASO has nearly completed its verification of the TA-55 safeguarded trailer pad startup readiness (site rep weekly 9/2/05); the verification process so far has been ad-hoc but thorough. However, last Friday (9/16), LASO proposed to NNSA headquarters (NA-10) a pad fire protection exemption without obtaining concurrence from LASO staff responsible for safety basis and for fire protection. The exemption request is on hold; LANL is working with LASO to resolve remaining technical issues, which involve new hazards and controls not recognized when the exemption request was generated. LASO's weak concurrence process is a recurring issue (site rep weekly 8/26/05). Furthermore, 5 of 10 LASO technical managers have not completed the Senior Technical Safety Manager (STSM) qualification, nor are compensatory measures apparent (ref: DOE response to Board Recommendation 93-3, Improving DOE Technical Capability). This aspect, coupled with the last year's turnover of LASO technical managers, may be further weakening local federal oversight.

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

SUBJECT: Los Alamos Report for Week Ending August 26, 2005

NNSA Oversight: Safety oversight by the NNSA Site Office (LASO) is increasingly hampered by several factors, including an imbalance of experience and authority within LASO management and the lack of a formal concurrence process that would provide LASO management a balanced perspective and unity-of-purpose before decisions are made. These are longstanding issues (e.g., site rep weeklies 3/29/02, 8/23/02), but their safety significance is increasing at this time of transition. Recent symptoms include the premature declaration of readiness for the TA-55 pad ORR and the two ORR pre-start findings on federal oversight (site rep weekly 7/8/05); these findings indicated a lack of a demonstrable oversight program for the pad and a lack of active counterbalance between program and operations or other safety personnel. Events since then indicate the problems persist, resulting in a loss of focus. Another limiting factor is inadequate field presence; for example, the number of deployed, qualified facility reps (7) has dropped by about a third in the last year and is now about a third of that projected to be required in the most recent LASO facility rep staffing analysis (20 - see site rep weekly 1/7/05). Experienced federal management, adequate experienced staff, focused attention, and balanced perspective all appear to be key through contract transition, and they all warrant attention.

The original DNFSB reports are available at [http://www.dnfsb.gov/pub\\_docs/lanl/wr\\_la.html](http://www.dnfsb.gov/pub_docs/lanl/wr_la.html)

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