

Nuclear Watch new mexico

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Contact: Jay Coghlan, Nuclear Watch, 505.989.7342, c. 505.920.7118, jay@nukewatch.org

Panel Finds Lifetimes of Existing Nuclear Warheads Can Be Extended For Decades; Undercuts Argument for New Designs and Facilities

Santa Fe, NM - In an unclassified executive summary obtained by Nuclear Watch New Mexico today, a prestigious independent panel named JASON has found that the operational lifetimes of existing nuclear weapons can be extended for decades through current Life Extension Programs (LEPs).

Among the report's key findings are:

“JASON finds no evidence that accumulation of changes incurred from aging and LEPs [existing Life Extension Programs] have increased risk to certification of today's deployed nuclear warheads”

and

“Lifetimes of today's nuclear warheads could be extended for decades, with no anticipated loss in confidence, by using approaches similar to those employed in LEPs to date.”

Nuclear Watch contends that these findings seriously undermine arguments made by the nuclear weapons labs and the Pentagon that new-design nuclear weapons are needed, in part for future ratification of the long-hoped-for Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Established in 1960, JASON is a preeminent independent advisory organization that conducts defense-related science and technology assessments for the U.S. government. The top Democrat and Republican on the key House Armed Services Committee first requested the JASON study on Life Extension Programs in February 2008. This report comes as the Obama administration is preparing its widely anticipated “Nuclear Posture Review” for release in February 2010. This assessment of U.S. nuclear strategy, forces and operations should include a determination on how the nation will maintain its stockpile and support research and production complex, while also beginning to meet the President's declared long-term goal of a nuclear weapons-free world.

Nuclear Watch New Mexico has long argued for a “Curatorship” approach for the nuclear stockpile in which existing warheads are kept as close to the original designs as possible in order to not introduce changes that could affect reliability. As the result of a request that Nuclear Watch made to Senator Jeff Bingaman, in November 2006 the JASONS released a groundbreaking study that found that the plutonium “triggers” for U.S. nuclear weapons last for 85 years or more. This new report adds to the growing body of evidence that the existing stockpile is safe and reliable and can be confidently maintained with enhanced surveillance. Nuclear Watch further contends that it would be foolhardy to trade that confidence in the existing stockpile for speculative new designs.

Nuclear Watch believes this report also raises more questions about the need for proposed new nuclear weapons production plants, such as the multi-billion dollar plutonium “Nuclear Facility” at Los Alamos and a “Uranium Processing Facility” at the Y-12 Plant in Tennessee, and a new ~\$660 million Kansas City Plant for nonnuclear components.

“The next step is to take a long, hard look at proposed new production facilities for the nuclear weapons complex,” said Jay Coghlan, Executive Director of Nuclear Watch. “We’ve been told that both new-design nuclear weapons and new production facilities are needed, but today we learned different. We hoped to see that reflected in both the pending Nuclear Posture Review and future Senate debate over ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.”

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The unclassified executive summary of the JASON report on Life Extension Programs is available at - http://www.nukewatch.org/facts/nwd/JASON_ReportLEP.pdf

551 West Cordova Road #808 Santa Fe, New Mexico 87505 • 505.989.7342
info@nukewatch.org • www.nukewatch.org • www.nukewatch.org/watchblog/