



For further information, contact: Jay Coghlan (505) 989-7342 or: jay@nukewatch.org
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WATCHDOG GROUP PUTS LOS ALAMOS LAB ENVIRO. IMPACT DOCUMENTS ONLINE; NUCLEAR WEAPONS LAB REFUSED TO POST BACKGROUND FOR EXPANSION PLANS

Santa Fe, NM – A citizens' group has given the public access to a trove of unclassified documents about a major U.S. nuclear weapons site, information which the Department of Energy (DOE) refused to make readily available. Nuclear Watch New Mexico has posted on its website (<http://www.nukewatch.org>) materials the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) is relying upon to justify a major expansion of its nuclear weapons production activities.

In its draft "Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement for Continued Operations at Los Alamos" (LANL EIS), DOE declared its plans to:

- Quadruple the production of plutonium pits from 20 to 80 per year;
- Nearly double the resulting radioactive bomb wastes; and
- Increase the Lab's storage capacity of "special nuclear materials, mainly plutonium" to 7.3 tons.

A public comment period on the plan, required by the National Environmental Policy Act, ends September 20. The LANL EIS lists 65 pages of background reference materials totaling an estimated 30,000 pages in support of its plans. Los Alamos initially pledged to post on the web materials located at its official public repository for LANL EIS documents, but has subsequently refused that. Instead, DOE and the Lab expect interested citizens and experts from around the country to travel to Los Alamos to review the documents.

Nuclear Watch obtained the documents from DOE and posted them, in all an upload of 7.4 gigabytes. In the past, DOE has cited a small number of LANL maps and aerial photos scattered throughout the materials as a reason to categorically deny public access. To address that concern, Nuclear Watch New Mexico removed 46 maps and photos from the documents before posting them.

Jay Coghlan, Nuclear Watch Director, explained, "The 'security' argument was always hollow. If a small, non-profit watchdog organization can eliminate the images in question, surely DOE and LANL with their billion dollar supercomputers could have done so long ago. Instead, they want to use them as an excuse for keeping the public in the dark over their plans for increased nuclear weapons production."

The documents offer revealing insights into the Lab's future missions and present safety conditions. For example, one depicts possible future "Modern Pit Annexes" and "Additional Facility Sites" at LANL's plutonium pit production complex. DOE lost industrial-scale pit production at the Rocky Flats Plant near Denver after a 1989 FBI raid investigating environmental crimes. Since then, DOE has re-established "interim" production at LANL, while also proposing to resume Cold War-like levels at a "Modern Pit Facility" at one of five candidate sites across the country. Congress has rejected that proposal in each of the last two years. "As a result," Coghlan said, "there is increasing evidence that Los Alamos will inevitably slip into becoming the nation's permanent site for plutonium pit production."

Another example is a 2003 safety analysis of the Lab's radioactive waste dump in which the senior DOE safety analyst berates LANL for "miscalculations, misstatements [and] use of incorrect values." The review led to a 150-fold increase in the calculated offsite fatal dose in the event of a potential accident. However, the safety analyst was later transferred from Los Alamos over his protests.

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A searchable LANL EIS, the reference documents and search tips are all at www.nukewatch.org
Nuclear Watch's public comments on the LANL EIS will be available by September 13.