

DOE's Analysis of Plutonium "Pit" Production at Los Alamos, for Nuclear Weapons, Must be Amended to Cover Issues Ignored

Options to "Reuse" Plutonium Pits and Method to Purify Plutonium are Lacking in Draft Supplement Analysis, Raising Legal Questions about NNSA's NEPA Review

COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA, USA, May 12, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The U.S. Department of Energy's draft environmental review of production of plutonium "pits" (cores) for all new and existing nuclear warheads at the Los Alamos National Laboratory lacks discussion of key issues and a revised document must be prepared, according to the public interest group [Savannah River Site Watch](#).

The environmental review conducted by the DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration for LANL pit production leaves out at least two issues of

paramount concern: 1) "reuse" of existing pits in nuclear warheads rather than use of new pits and 2) methods to produce purified plutonium used for pit production. Lacking any discussion whatsoever of these essential issues, the ill-prepared document must be amended and reissued for public comment, according to SRS Watch, based in Columbia, South Carolina.

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*Tom Clements, Director,
Savannah River Site Watch*

The comment period on the cursory draft environmental review on expanded "pit" production for new and refurbished nuclear weapons at Los Alamos - the Draft Supplement Analysis of the 2008 Site-wide Environmental Impact Statement (SWEIS) for Continued Operations of Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) - ended on May 9. In it, NNSA proposed to build new capability at Los Alamos in New Mexico to "begin producing a minimum of 30 pits a year at LANL no later than during 2026." In an indication that NNSA is unclear about what it's aiming for, the document also "evaluates the potential environmental

impacts of producing up to 80 pits per year at LANL.”

“In its headlong and unjustified rush to expand plutonium pit production, NNSA has gotten very sloppy and prepared an inferior document that falls apart under scrutiny,” said Tom Clements, director of SRS Watch. “The bungled draft document must either be discarded or a detailed



Los Alamos National Lab in New Mexico has faltered with the existing plutonium pit-production mission of 20 pits per year; how can it produce 30 or 80 pits per year?

supplement must be prepared and reopened for comment," added Clements. "It is well known that NNSA can't properly manage complex, costly projects and when extreme schedule pressure and disruption from the coronavirus are thrown in, NNSA and administrator Lisa Gordon-Hagerty are setting the stage for a costly plutonium train wreck."

SRS Watch asserts no new pit production is necessary and will only fuel a new nuclear arms race. Due to inability to properly handle plutonium, Los Alamos has failed to produce the currently authorized 20 pits per year and there is no evidence it can produce 30 pits or more per year. "NNSA's blind pursuit of new-design weapons, the W87-1 and W93, and replacement of all pits in almost 4000 active and reserve warheads most likely won't be accomplished but it can kick off a dangerous nuclear arms race that will undermine national security," said Clements.

In comments on the draft SA, submitted on May 8, [SRS Watch called for an amended document to be produced](#): "A FORMAL REQUEST is hereby being made for a supplement to the Supplement Analysis or a revised draft SA to be prepared on the issues of 1) reuse of plutonium pits in new and refurbished nuclear warheads and 2) production of purified plutonium for production of new pits. Both issues can be discussed in a single supplement document or a revised or edited supplement to the draft SA released for public comment. These matters are too important and the discussion about them is of such legal significance for them to simply be somehow included in any final SA without opportunity for public comment."

According to the National Environmental Policy Act, "If a draft statement is so inadequate as to preclude meaningful analysis, the agency shall prepare and circulate a revised draft of the appropriate portion."

Additionally, as there are "substantial changes in the proposed action that are relevant to environmental concerns" and "there are significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action or its impacts," it is legally required for the draft document to be supplemented and reissued for comment.

Absent preparation of a revised draft on Los Alamos pit production, NNSA's legal problems in not following the requirements of NEPA will be compounded, according to SRS Watch.

SRS WATCH

Savannah River Site Watch

SRS Watch is a non-profit organization working on sound policies and projects by the U.S. Department of Energy, with a focus on the Savannah River Site (SRS) near Aiken, South Carolina



Abandoned plutonium fuel (MOX) building at Savannah River Site proposed for Plutonium Bomb Plant (PBP); investigations needed into fraud, waste, abuse and mismanagement of waste of \$8 billion at MOX project; photo courtesy High Flyer to SRS Watch

NNSA has also prepared a draft EIS on production of 50 or more pits at a Plutonium Bomb Plant at the Savannah River Site in South Carolina. NNSA has proposed using a partially built plutonium fuel (MOX) fabrication facility at SRS that was terminated in 2018 after a waste of \$8 billion, a matter demanding investigation into fraud, waste, abuse and mismanagement.

Due to a request by SRS Watch and other groups, the comment period on that draft SRS document has been extended until June 2. That document mentions methods of plutonium purification and confirms pit reuse is being considered: "For the foreseeable future, NNSA will rely on a combination of newly manufactured pits and judicious reuse of existing pits to modernize the U.S. nuclear stockpile. This approach enables NNSA to implement a moderately sized pit manufacturing capability of not less than 80 pits per year beginning during 2030." (page S-4)

SRS Watch, Nuclear Watch New Mexico, and Tri-Valley CAREs - members of the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability (ANA) - have called on NNSA to first prepare a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) before preparing site-specific environmental documents on pit production. According to the groups, the over-arching DOE complex-wide environmental impacts and need for pit production must first be reviewed in the PEIS. "NNSA has shirked its legal obligation to first prepare the PEIS and is at risk of a legal challenge under NEPA," according to Clements.

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Notes:

Comments by SRS Watch on draft Supplement Analysis on plutonium pit production at Los Alamos, May 8, 2020:

<https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Comments-on-draft-Supplement-Analysis-LANL-pits-Clements-final-May-8-2020.pdf>

Draft Supplement Analysis of the 2008 Site-wide Environmental Impact Statement (SWEIS) for Continued Operations of Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL):

<https://www.energy.gov/nnsa/articles/public-invited-comment-expanded-plutonium-pit-production-los-alamos-national-0>

Draft EIS on Plutonium Pit Production at the Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina (SRS Pit Production EIS), comment period extended 15 days, to June 2:

<https://www.energy.gov/nepa/downloads/doeeis-0541-draft-environmental-impact-statement>

Comments by Nuclear Watch New Mexico to the draft Supplement Analysis, May 9, 2020:

<https://nukewatch.org/lanl-sweis-sa-nukewatch-comments/>

Comments by over 100 groups and individuals to draft SA, May 9, 2020:

<https://nukewatch.org/collective-public-comments-on-lanl-pit-production-5-9-20>

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