

Lawsuit Compels Nationwide Public Review of Plutonium Bomb Core Production

Federal Register of May 9 Outlines Process of National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) to Prepare Programmatic EIS on Expanded Plutonium Pit Production

AIKEN, SC, UNITED STATES, May 9, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Today the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), the semi-autonomous nuclear weapons agency within the Department of Energy, published a formal [Notice of Intent in the Federal Register](#) to complete a nationwide "programmatic environmental impact statement" (PEIS) on the expanded production of plutonium "pit" bomb cores. Pits are the essential radioactive triggers of modern nuclear weapons. The NNSA is aggressively seeking their expanded production for new-design nuclear weapons for the new nuclear arms race.



DOE's Los Alamos National Lab in northern New Mexico is in a rushed program to increase plutonium pit program for new nuclear warheads, beginning with the pit for the Sentinel missile, a new first-strike ICBM with a W87-1 warhead.

The South Carolina Environmental Law Project (SCELP) successfully represented the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition and Nuclear Watch New Mexico, SRS Watch and Tri-Valley Communities Against a Radioactive Environment in a legal challenge to NNSA's attempt to improperly jump start dual site pit production. [On September 30, 2024, United States District Court Judge Mary Geiger Lewis](#) ruled that the NNSA had violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by failing to properly consider alternatives before proceeding with its plan to produce at least 30 pits per year at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) in New Mexico and at least 50 pits per year at the Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina.

The Court found that NNSA's plans for pit production had fundamentally changed from its earlier analyses which had not considered simultaneous pit production at two sites.

As a result of this ruling and a [subsequent settlement of January 16, 2025](#), the Defendants are now required to newly analyze pit production at a nationwide programmatic level. This means undertaking a thorough analysis of the impacts of pit production at NNSA sites throughout the United States, including the generation of new radioactive wastes and its disposal.

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This PEIS that we fought hard for empowers citizens to tell policy makers what they think about expanded pit production and the \$2 trillion ‘modernization’ program to keep nuclear weapons forever.”

*Jay Coghlan, Nuclear Watch
New Mexico*

Virtual public meetings to determine the needed scope of the programmatic environmental impact statement are scheduled for May 27 and 28. Public comments for scoping ends July 14 and can be emailed to PitPEIS@nnsa.doe.gov. NNSA expects to complete its draft PEIS within a year, then in-person public hearings will be held in Livermore, CA; Santa Fe, NM; Kansas City, MO; Aiken, SC; and Washington, DC.

As an indicator of the potential importance of this PEIS process, SCELPE and co-plaintiffs have been asked by the

Nobel Peace Prize Center in Oslo, Norway, to present on “how it is possible to do activism inside the court room” on August 6, the 80th anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing. In recognition of its admirable work, SCELPE will receive an award from the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability in Washington, DC, on June 10th.

Plutonium pits are the fissile cores of nuclear weapons. The Los Alamos Lab was assigned a mission of limited pit production after a 1989 FBI raid investigating environmental crimes at the notorious Rocky Flats Plant near Denver, CO. In 2018 the NNSA decided to pursue pit production at LANL and SRS.

No future pit production is to maintain the safety and reliability of the existing, extensively tested nuclear weapons stockpile. Instead, future production is for speculative new-design nuclear weapons that can’t be tested because of an international testing moratorium.

Independent experts have found that plutonium pits have reliable lifetimes of at least 100 years (their average age is now around 42). Moreover, at least 15,000 pits are already stored at the NNSA’s Pantex Plant in Texas. Expanded plutonium pit production will cost taxpayers more than \$60 billion over thirty years.

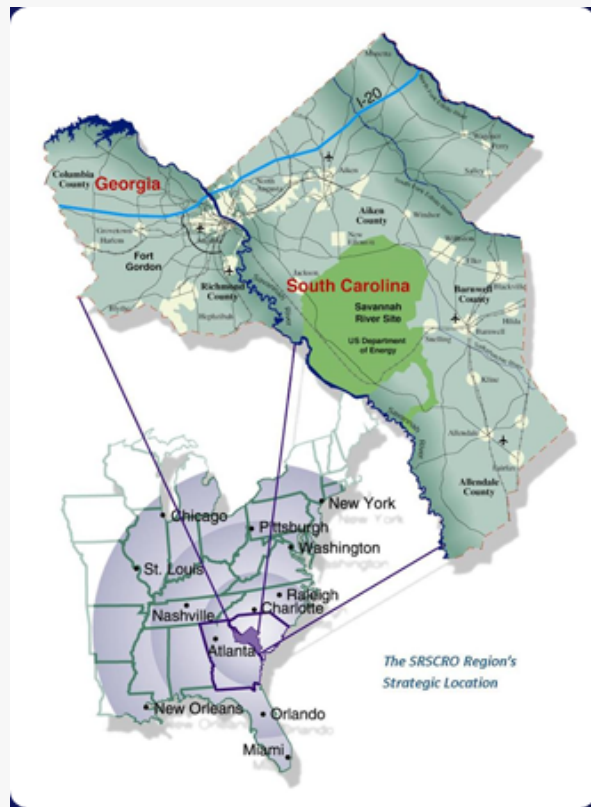
Ben Cunningham, SCELPE’s lead attorney in this case, declared the following: “We implore the public to participate fully in the PEIS process—from participating in the scoping meetings to commenting on the draft PEIS. The vast expansion of the nuclear arsenal that is facilitated by the increase in pit production will be exorbitantly expensive, will create radioactive wastes that can last for thousands of years, and the new weapons produced by this expansion could ultimately

endanger hundreds of millions of lives. Please weigh in and express your concerns to the decisionmakers."

Queen Quet, elected Chieftess of the Gullah/Geechee Nation, said: "I am thankful to SCLP and the rest of our national team that stood together to ensure that we protect our communities not only today but also for future generations. The type of compliance that we have fought for is even more crucial given the current environmental and political climate. I am looking forward to us being able to engage in the next phase of this process so that we can ensure that the waters that reach the Sea Islands will be safe."

Tom Clements, director of SRS Watch, noted, "Given that we are armed with a decisive federal court ruling that requires the preparation of the PEIS by NNSA, the draft PEIS must include an analysis of plutonium aging and pit reuse, the proliferation risks of new U.S. warheads, plans for plutonium transportation and the uncertain future disposal of plutonium wastes in the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in southern New Mexico."

"Prior to our lawsuit, the agency failed to include other sites involved in future plutonium pit production in its required analyses, chief among them the Lawrence Livermore Lab in California, the Kansas City Plant in Missouri, and the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant. The judge clearly saw these violations and ordered the NNSA to complete the programmatic



Savannah River Site is located in South Carolina, across the river from Georgia. SRS's 5 nuclear reactors produced over 36 metric tons of weapon-grade plutonium and the site processes tritium for warheads. Plutonium pit production would be a new, challenging mission.



Citizens protest outside the now-closed DOE Rocky Flats plutonium pit factory near Boulder, Colorado in 1992, with the prescient call that the contaminated Rocky Flats facility, which suffered numerous plutonium fires, not be dumped on SRS in South Carolina.

nationwide analysis which should have been done from the outset. This is a victory for public involvement. It will hopefully result in credible alternatives that are more protective of the environment and the impacted communities,” said Scott Yundt, Executive Director at Tri-Valley CAREs, in Livermore, CA.

Jay Coghlan of Nuclear Watch New Mexico commented, “This programmatic environmental impact statement that we fought long and hard for empowers citizens to tell policy makers what they think about decisions being made in their name. Let them know what you think about the \$2 trillion ‘modernization’ program to keep nuclear weapons forever while domestic programs are gutted to pay for tax cuts for the rich. We should demand that this required process under the National Environmental Policy Act becomes a public referendum on the new nuclear arms race and the hollowing out of our society.”

Release posted here: <https://nukewatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Lawsuit-Compels-Nationwide-Public-Review-of-Plutonium-Bomb-Core-Production.pdf>

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