

Securing Our Future: Halting Unnecessary Nuclear Weapons Production



The Department of Energy (DOE) Complex Transformation plan involves a massive overhaul of U.S. nuclear weapons facilities. The vision of DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) includes a continuous production stream of refurbished and modified nuclear weapons involving a host of "modernized" plants. Far from scaling back nuclear weapons activities, major new facilities are planned for uranium component production and plutonium bomb cores, among others. With both the public and national security experts calling for U.S. leadership toward a nuclear weapons-free world, Complex Transformation is counterproductive.

Additionally, DOE is attempting to illegally build a new nuclear weapons plant in Kansas City, Missouri on the basis of a flawed environmental assessment by using "alternative financing" and private developers. Federal litigation has been filed by public interest organizations.

PUBLIC OPPOSITION

Since it was first proposed, Complex Transformation has faced public opposition unprecedented in DOE history. During legally required comment periods in 2006 and again in 2008, DOE received more than 140,000 comments opposing the scheme. Despite this unprecedented outcry, DOE ignored most of the public's recommendations and has moved forward with its plan.

PLUTONIUM BOMB CORES

Plutonium pits—carefully fabricated spheres of metal—and high explosives are the "triggers" for modern thermonuclear weapons. The U.S. presently has about 25,000 plutonium pits. Nearly 10,000 are in existing nuclear warheads. More than 10,000 "surplus" pits and five thousand in "strategic reserve" are stored at the Pantex Plant near Amarillo, TX. The Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) in New Mexico is engaged in limited production of pits for a sub-launched warhead.

Nuclear weapons assembly and disassembly occurs at the Pantex Plant. The facility has been specifically authorized to "reuse" up to 350 existing pits per year, mooted any claimed need to produce pits for the planned nuclear stockpile, other than those being fabricated at LANL. Pantex boasts that pit reuse is far less expensive and environmentally damaging than new

Recommendations

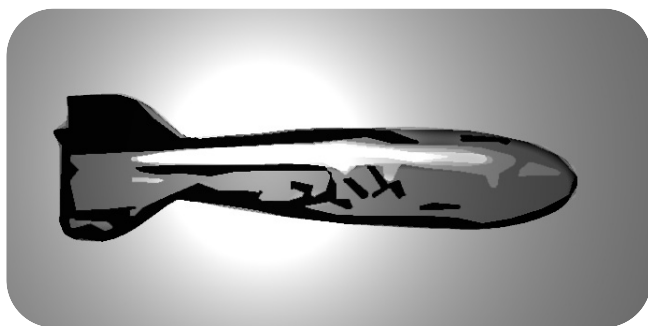
- Postpone all significant new production and construction decisions regarding the nuclear weapons complex until the 2009 Nuclear Posture Review is completed.
- Eliminate all funding for the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement "Nuclear Facility" at Los Alamos and the Uranium Processing Facility at Y-12.
- Stop plans for a new Kansas City Plant until the future of the arsenal is clear.
- Mandate increased verifiable, irreversible dismantlement of nuclear warheads and provide adequate funding.
- Implement a "curatorship" program for the U.S. nuclear weapons complex in line with new initiatives for a smaller stockpile.

pit production. More than enough pits have already been produced at LANL for annual surveillance tests for the next 15 years. Future arms control agreements may make even more spares available for maintenance tests.

EXPANDING PIT PRODUCTION

The Complex Transformation Record of Decision designates LANL as the preferred permanent pit production site. The proposed "Nuclear Facility" for LANL's Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) Project is central to expanded plutonium capabilities. Estimated total construction costs of this proposed facility have nearly quadrupled since 2004 to more than \$2 billion.

NNSA has recently chosen to defer any decision on expanding plutonium pit production at LANL until a new Congressionally-required Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) is complete. Until then, LANL's maximum production capacity will remain limited to 20 pits per year, more than enough to meet current stockpile requirements, making the CMRR's Nuclear Facility unnecessary.



LIFE EXTENSION PROGRAM

Ongoing nuclear weapons production in the U.S. takes place under Life Extension Programs (LEPs). In the mid-1990's the weapons establishment shifted its focus to concerns that the current nuclear arsenal, no longer being replenished with new warheads, would have to serve a longer life than planned. Thus the Stockpile Stewardship and Management (SSM) Program was born. SSM's mission included periodic surveillance and assessment of warheads and warhead components to make sure they would still "function as designed" if they were ever used.

The Life Extension Programs grew out of the Stockpile Stewardship program. Under the LEPs, warheads are brought to the Pantex Plant in Texas where they are partially disassembled and component pieces replaced. The thermonuclear secondaries, the components responsible for the main explosion, are returned to the Y-12 Plant in Oak Ridge, Tennessee for rebuilding.

The Complex Transformation Record of Decisions calls for a \$3 billion Uranium Processing Facility to be built at the Y-12 plant at Oak Ridge for the production of additional secondaries to support LEPs. The LEPs have a huge price tag, \$234 million in FY 2008. No documentation has ever been made public demonstrating the necessity for LEPs in order to maintain the nuclear arsenal in good working order.

Last year, it was revealed that LEP upgrades to the W76 warheads would add military capabilities. The modifications give the warhead increased accuracy and a new fuze that allows for selecting the optimum height of burst.

THE CURATORSHIP ALTERNATIVE

A "curatorship" program for the U.S. nuclear arsenal would rely on increased surveillance and long established procedures, such as limited life components replacement, to maintain the stockpile while adhering to original designs as much as possible. Unlike LEPs, curatorship does not intentionally introduce changes. As a result, it is more consistent with U.S. international nonproliferation goals. Curatorship would maintain the arsenal safely and reliably while it awaits dismantlement. Such a program would:

- Increase U.S. security by reducing reliance on nuclear weapons
- Reduce costs of maintaining and deploying an enduring nuclear arsenal
- Free up resources at national labs to address other significant challenges
- Demonstrate global leadership toward a nuclear weapons-free world
- Support the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty