



Los Alamos Study Group

Nuclear Disarmament • Environmental Protection • Social Justice • Economic Sustainability

LANL's Plutonium Pit Palace

👉 **What You Can Do to STOP it** 👈

November 10, 2010

The proposed Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility (CMRR-NF) is an unnecessary nuclear weapons production facility for the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). When it was originally proposed in 2002, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) estimated the entire project would cost between \$350 and \$400 million. Its cost has since inflated enormously. Today the Nuclear Facility portion alone is estimated to cost between \$5.5 and \$6 billion - but the government still has no firm and final figure and won't for years. This nuclear pork barrel project could quite literally suck the oxygen out of the air in New Mexico, making new federal investments in our schools, environment, infrastructure and industries difficult. Furthermore, it is a real and symbolic provocation that will undermine global efforts toward disarmament and non-proliferation.



The CMRR project construction site at TA-55: In the foreground is the existing Plutonium Facility, PF-4, where plutonium "pits" are fabricated. In the upper left is the Radiological Laboratory Utility Office Building ("RLUOB") portion of the CMRR. To RLUOB's right is the site of the proposed Nuclear Facility. Disturbed construction areas will encompass 94 acres up and down the canyon.

A Modern Pit Factory – The CMRR project is said to replace the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research (CMR) building, an old structure that the laboratory has partially abandoned. The CMR was (and is) LANL's biggest all-purpose industrial-scale chemistry laboratory, capable of pilot production and of handling radioactive materials of all kinds. It has unique facilities which will not be replaced by CMRR (e.g. hot cells for remote handling of radioactive materials).

The “replacement” part of the CMRR name is deceptive in other ways too, given the huge scale of the proposed building, including a storage vault for 6 metric tons of plutonium, which would about triple LANL's inventory. Next door is the existing Plutonium Facility, which contains all the necessary equipment and technology for assembling large quantities of plutonium warhead cores, known as “pits.” If funded, this project would fulfill George W. Bush’s plan to build a “modern” pit facility, capable of turning out large numbers of pits for new warheads in short order, at a rate NNSA documents suggest could be 125 pits/year, surging to 200 pits/year if desired.

Construction began on the first and smaller of two buildings in the CMRR project, the RLUOB, in January 2006. It will be complete in 2013. Current projections estimate the Nuclear Facility will be complete in 2022.

During the Bush Administration, project funding rose slowly. House members in particular were aware that the big buildup seemed to be at cross-purposes with dwindling needs and international treaties, and questioned its overall rationale. House appropriators resisted, then denied, administration funding requests, but the project was kept alive by the Senate, particularly by Republican Pete Domenici's influence in conference committee negotiations.

Nuclear Rearmament — When the Obama administration submitted its budget proposal in February of this year, the funding request for CMRR-NF about tripled to \$169 million (M) from the \$58 million it obtained in 2009. On October 1 Congress approved an "emergency" \$624 million increase for nuclear weapons spending, largely on the basis of funding the CMRR-NF and other increasingly-expensive infrastructure projects. The CMRR-NF's budget may be increased again this month when Congress reconvenes. There is also a slight chance it might be cut back.

The overall project has been marked by escalating costs — tenfold since the project's initiation — and by an unsettling seismic assessment that requires extraordinary safety measures. If built, CMRR would become the largest public project in New Mexico history by about a factor of ten, save the interstate highways.

To add to the folly, the additional pit manufacturing capability is no longer needed, because the existing spare pit inventory provides thousands of usable, long-lasting, backups to the decreasing stockpile. Without CMRR-NF, LANL already has a significant pit manufacturing capability, which has been only loosely managed because there is no demand for the product. This too is being expanded, in a separate project. Among the sane and sensible ways to cut the federal budget, cutting the CMRR-NF is one of the best, on behalf of our country and the world. If we do build CMRR-NF, don't ask where the money went for the schools we need, or the climate- and business-saving infrastructure, or the health and elder-care. We will have buried our hopes for a better future in a pit in Los Alamos.

How you can help STOP the proposed plutonium pit palace!

1. **Give:** Make a donation to the Study Group. Write on the check or designate in the on-line donation field, "Stop construction and operation of the CMRR-NF!" Donate online at lasg.org.
2. **Learn:** Begin by learning about the proposed CMRR-NF from our web page: http://lasg.org/CMRR/open_page.htm. Read the legal complaint. You might make a list of your questions. Knowledge is power.
3. **Convene:** If you organize a small group of your friends, or get us on the agenda of an existing organization, we will meet with you and others. We can answer some questions and pose others. For the truly "live" questions, the ones that matter most, we ourselves are going to be the answers.
4. **Work with local government:** Ask your elected officials in county, city, and Pueblo governments to request a brand-new Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), a study of alternatives to the CMRR-NF, and a pause in the project in the meantime.
5. **Contact your congressperson and senators:** Ask them to request: a new EIS, a study of alternatives to the CMRR-NF, and a cessation of further investments in the facility until these are prepared.
6. **Write, blog, and speak to your family, friends, colleagues:** To get started visit our website and check out the special section devoted to the CMRR issue. Educate yourself and write factual articles and letters based on that information. Your individual voice can have a major impact and reach a wide range of people: state legislators, city and county councilors, business and community leaders – and, directly or indirectly, those who make decisions about this project.
7. **Build business and organizational support:** There are many businesses and organizations in New Mexico that share your dissatisfaction as to the decisions being made concerning our state and its future – whether the federal money coming into the state is spent on nuclear weapons and the military industrial complex, or invested in a more sustainable future. Try approaching your friends and contacts in business and other organizations and ask them to join you in writing a letter in support of our work to stop the CMRR Nuclear Facility. And if they can also donate toward this effort, that would be even better. Our litigation has already started to bring results. Join with us if you can.