

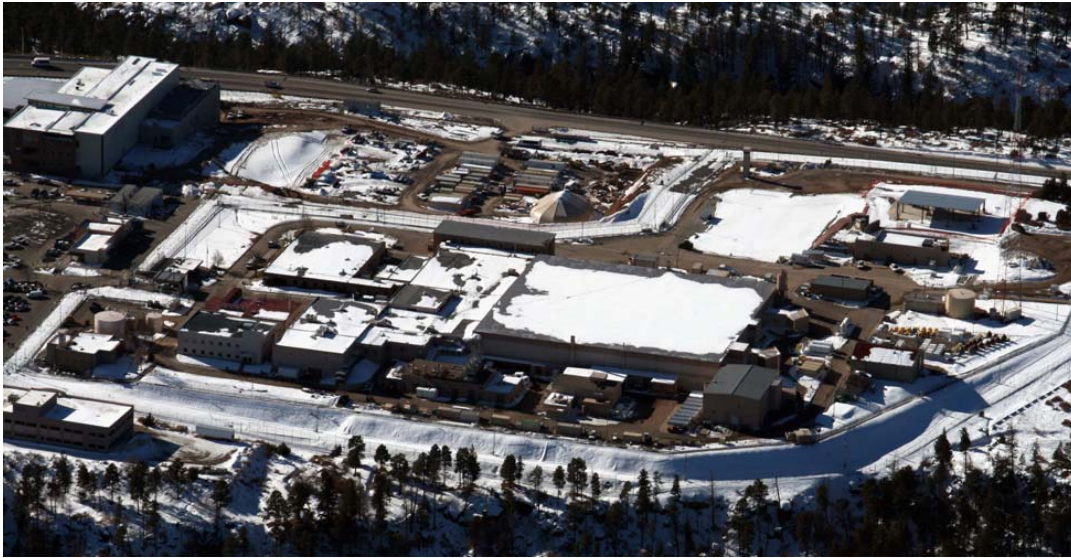


Los Alamos Study Group

Nuclear Disarmament • Environmental Protection • Social Justice • Economic Sustainability

Los Alamos' Proposed Plutonium Pit Palace Frequently Asked Questions

December 13, 2010 update



Technical Area (TA) 55 at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). The existing Plutonium Facility, PF-4, is in the middle foreground. Plutonium warhead cores ("pits") are fabricated there. The Radiological Laboratory, Utility, and Office Building (RLUOB) portion of the CMRR project is in the upper left. The construction yard to RLUOB's right is the site of the proposed CMRR Nuclear Facility.

What is the CMRR-Nuclear Facility?

- The proposed Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility (CMRR-NF) is an unnecessary nuclear weapons design and production facility that the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) intends to build, with construction starting in 2011. Some preliminary construction activities are already underway.
- Construction of the Nuclear Facility is by no means assured. Many problems with the building's design, skyrocketing cost, environmental and safety problems, lack of mission justification, and the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA's) continuing violation of the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) have already delayed and imperiled the project.
- A lawsuit filed in federal court by the Los Alamos Study Group on August 16, 2010 is seeking an injunction to stop construction of the Nuclear Facility pending a new and complete Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Compelling NNSA to comply with NEPA will help the federal government consider a range of cheaper, safer, and more appropriate alternatives, most of which would rule out building the Nuclear Facility.

What is the CMRR-Nuclear Facility for?

- If built it would transform LANL into a plutonium factory capable of fabricating upwards of 125 plutonium warhead cores ("pits") per year in a single shift, or 200 pits/year working double shifts.
- It includes a 6 metric ton vault for plutonium and other nuclear materials, and will also house other missions related to nuclear weapons design and testing.
- Its "modular" design and "hotel concept" interior layout will allow LANL to task the facility with future, yet-to-be-specified or authorized, missions related to nuclear weapons design, testing and production.

Is it necessary?

- No. The United States has a surfeit of plutonium pits for the nuclear weapons stockpile. These pits age only very slowly and will remain reliable components of existing weapons for another 70 years if not far longer.
- LANL already has sufficient facilities to conduct "actinide research and materials characterization" missions.
- There are many cheaper and safer alternatives. NNSA has never assessed the proposed CMRR-Nuclear Facility and compared it to these currently available alternatives.

How much will it cost?

- When it was originally proposed in 2002, NNSA estimated the entire project (which then included 3 separate buildings) would cost between \$350 and \$500 million (M), plus administrative costs later estimated at \$100 M.
- The Nuclear Facility's cost has since inflated enormously. Today the Nuclear Facility is estimated to cost between \$3.7 and \$5.8 billion (B), a more than ten-fold increase. The government still has no final figure.
- NNSA has already spent \$290 M on design of the Nuclear Facility, with at least three years to go on design.
- On October 1, 2010 Congress appropriated another \$169 M for the CMRR-NF, with \$292 M requested next year.

How long will construction take?

- In 2003 NNSA claimed construction of the nuclear facility would take 34 months.
- In June of 2010 NNSA officials revealed that construction would take upwards of 144 months.
- The Nuclear Facility will not be operation until 2023 at the earliest.

What impact will the project have on our economy and politics?

- The Nuclear Facility would be the single largest federal capital investment in New Mexico. It would be the most expensive construction project in the state's history (excepting the interstate highways) by about a factor of ten.
- The project's prime contractor (LANS, LLC) is composed of out-of-state-corporations. All major subcontractors working on design thus far have been headquartered out of state. Many suppliers and some of the construction workforce would also come from out of state due to nuclear certification and quality assurance requirements.
- Compared to almost any other possible federal project, the Nuclear Facility's initial economic benefit to northern New Mexico would be small, in some ways negative. Dollar for dollar, federal investments in home weatherization, alternative energy development, regional infrastructure, or public facilities like schools, just to name a few of many needed investments, would generate more jobs, inject cash more effectively and broadly into the regional economy, and produce more durable benefits for thousands of citizens and businesses.
- The \$6 billion or more required to build this monster project plus its supporting infrastructure won't be available for other purposes. This opportunity cost damages prospects for investments elsewhere, including in the green jobs we need for our economy, climate, and energy supply. It is hard to imagine the House or Senate giving *another* comparably huge project to New Mexico, which has the highest per capita federal spending of any state.

What impact will the project have on our environment?

- Construction would directly disturb 94 acres of the Pajarito Plateau, harming forests and potentially damaging wetlands. Nighttime construction lights, noise, dust pollution, and construction traffic would all affect wildlife.
- More than 400,000 cubic yards of earth will be excavated from the project site – including an entire geologic stratum of material. These spoils would be dumped somewhere else on site, disturbing further land area and posing air quality, water quality, and erosion risks.
- About three hundred thousand cubic yards of aggregate for concrete will be mined from the region.
- The Nuclear Facility will consume massive amounts of resources: 371,000 cubic yards of concrete, about 1/10 that used to build Hoover Dam, and; 18,000 tons of steel, more than twice the tonnage in France's Eiffel Tower.
- Concrete production will produce in excess of 100,000 metric tons of CO₂, four times the federal guidance level requiring assessment of greenhouse gas emissions for a proposed project.
- Operation of the Nuclear Facility will involve routine handling and transport of plutonium, uranium, and other radioactive and toxic materials, producing regular emissions and exposures and posing risk of catastrophic release from accidents or malevolent acts.

What impact will the project have on our communities?

- If built the Nuclear Facility would transform the character of LANL, shifting it away from research (mostly weapons research) and toward nuclear weapons production. The Nuclear Facility would permanently commit northern New Mexico as the primary U.S. location for plutonium manufacturing.
- To build the Nuclear Facility NNSA's contractors will transport hundreds of thousands of yards of aggregate on regional highways, causing damage to roads, posing traffic hazards, and causing particulate and vehicle emissions pollution. Routes will pass through White Rock, San Ildefonso, very likely through Espanola, and possibly through other cities, villages, and pueblos.
- Closure of Pajarito Road for 2 years may be necessary, displacing traffic onto Los Alamos's main roads.

For more information and news about the CMRR-NF see our "monument of folly" web site:
http://www.lasg.org/CMRR/open_page.htm