

# We can stop LANL's plutonium warhead factory — SPEAK UP NOW!

## LANL's dangerous, expensive factory is “surplus-to-need.” Costs are soaring, completion is delayed, and impacts are mounting

Santa Fe is at a historic crossroads. Private yearnings for peace and healthier federal budget priorities are being increasingly swept aside by military “needs” – in Santa Fe's case nuclear weapons “needs” – which are not being effectively opposed. *Will Santa Fe be a city of peace or one that is increasingly devoted to preparations for nuclear war?* The implications for our politics, culture, economy, resources, and society run very deep in each case. If we are silent, the choice will be made for us. It's easy to speak up and reach out, but we have to actually do it.

Our location near Los Alamos makes our actions surprisingly influential. We have “the power of proximity” (Arundhati Roy) – if we choose to use it.

*First and foremost*, we are asking you to join 1,200 individuals and 260 organizational endorsers of the “Call for Sanity, not Nuclear Production” either by scanning the QR code in the yellow box or by typing “stopthebomb.org” into your browser and filling in a short form.

### Overall background, and a new opportunity

Every U.S. nuclear warhead and bomb has within it a plutonium-containing core, or “pit,” which when compressed causes a nuclear explosion. Pits are not in general interchangeable, and they age.

The vast U.S. nuclear arsenal does not need any new pits right now, but to the extent the U.S. retains nuclear weapons, new pits will eventually be needed. Right now there is no place to make them.

The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), the federal agency in charge of making nuclear warheads and bombs, is currently building two factories for doing this. Each will cost \$20 billion or more to build. Both will be done by 2032, NNSA says.

The smaller factory is centered in the 50-year-old main plutonium building at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) that is being remodeled for this purpose while in operation. Many other buildings are also required.

LANL's production is expected to be temporary, but no one knows how temporary, or when or even if actual production will start, or at what level it will do so. LANL's round-the-clock pit operations, which began in April, are expected to require 4,105 full-time staff.

A larger and more permanent factory, able to produce all the pits that might be “needed” in future decades, is being constructed deep within the 310 square-mile Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina.

NNSA believes it can operate the LANL factory at least until the SRS factory comes on line in 2035.

The two-factory plan was hatched in early 2018 as a result of pressure from the New Mexico delegation and other congressional hawks. Just the year before, NNSA had decided against building two factories and against using LANL's old plutonium facility as a factory. LANL production would require a brand-new factory, NNSA said then.

However, in its rush to start construction, NNSA never analyzed the environmental impacts of the new plan. In January of this year a 2021 South Carolina lawsuit that was

aimed at halting construction at SRS concluded with a requirement to conduct a belated analysis of the environmental impacts of alternative pit strategies – without, however, interrupting construction in NM or SC.

So now, at least formally, NNSA is finally entertaining comments on where pit production should be done: at one site (NM or SC – which?) or at both; and on the scope of environmental analysis it will do.

Two virtual hearings are planned, on May 27 (3-5 pm MDT) and May 28 (5-7 pm MDT). Written comments are accepted through July 14. For how to participate and/or comment see [https://lasg.org/press/2025/pressrelease\\_8May2025.html](https://lasg.org/press/2025/pressrelease_8May2025.html).

Experience suggests NNSA will disregard all public comments bearing on U.S. nuclear weapons.

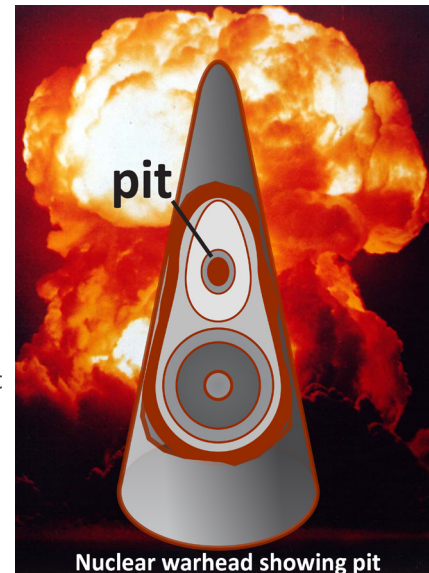
Comments from the state, local governments, and tribes are less easily dismissed and are therefore important – in this process and more importantly, beyond it.

But this process can be impactful beyond its inherent limitations, if we make it so. It is an opportunity. We hope you will help us open new channels of communication in our communities, across the “silos” of our busy lives, diverse affiliations, and our other obligations.

We have been holding virtual and in-person trainings and will keep doing so. Join all of us at [stopthebomb.org](https://stopthebomb.org) to learn more.

### Key themes and talking points

- The U.S. has a huge, diverse nuclear arsenal and LANL pit production is not necessary to maintain and deploy each and every current and planned weapon in it. While exact numbers are classified, the U.S. currently has about 5,177 nuclear warheads and bombs, of which at least 1,770 are currently deployed. An additional 1,930 are held in reserve, plus 1,477 warheads that have been officially retired. Explosive yields vary from 300 tons to 1,200 kilotons. There are four delivery methods: silo-based missiles, submarine-based missiles, bombs dropped from aircraft (currently, 4 kinds of U.S. aircraft plus NATO aircraft), and long-range cruise missiles (currently, launched from one kind of bomber). Congress has also demanded sea-launched cruise missiles and these are being developed (again). None of these weapons or planned replacements require LANL pits. LANL pit production has nothing to do with “deterrence” per-se.



Nuclear warhead showing pit

### The main pit production facility at the Savannah River Site



THIS FULLY-ADEQUATE FACILITY MAKES LANL'S FACTORY UNNECESSARY

- The SRS facility will be adequate to produce all necessary pits. LANL pit production will not be adequate to sustain any foreseeable stockpile at this time. Therefore, if LANL is a pit factory, two factories will be necessary. If SRS is a pit factory, it alone will suffice, not just for a few years but for the foreseeable future.
- Pit production at LANL has already been delayed between 4 and 6 years and its projected cost has increased by a factor of about 6 since 2018.
- As far as is publicly known there is no comparative federal study supporting either a) long-term pit production in LANL's old plutonium facility, or b) a two-site production plan. These strategies were rejected in two NNSA studies.
- LANL pits are desired solely for the purpose of augmenting the number of warheads on the proposed Sentinel silo-based missile with a new kind of warhead. The Air Force already has approximately 534 long-lasting, highly-accurate warheads available for the 400 Sentinel missile it expects to deploy between the late 2030s and the early 2050s. These warheads are currently being upgraded to be even more accurate and will be deployed on Sentinel.
- LANL pit production is an extreme waste of money (“your tax dollars at work!”). If all goes “well,” LANL's \$22 billion factory will reach full production in 2032 or 2033, only three years before the larger SRS factory – which is being built to do the whole pit mission without LANL's help – is slated to begin production.
- LANL pits are going to be extremely expensive, even by the standards of the nuclear weapons world. LANL pits will cost roughly \$100 million apiece, everything included. If we don't count the \$9 billion or so already spent, the price falls to ~\$75 million each. SRS pits will cost much less, because that facility will not need to operate 24/7 to produce pits and is being built from the get-go to be a production facility.
- The regional impacts of pit production at LANL are tremendous. These include but are not limited to:
  - Impacts on housing markets across the entire region, making housing less affordable for an increasingly large fraction of residents.
  - Impacts on water resources, both direct and indirect, through increased residential demand.



Traffic on NM 4, Mar 2022

- Impacts on labor markets. LANL's high salaries draw skilled labor into LANL's “black hole.” LANL jobs create nothing of value for the region, while bidding up labor costs for everybody else. LANL is a potent inequality engine.
- Impacts on electricity supply and on the land involved in producing that electricity and conveying it across the precious Caja del Rio.

These are just some of the most obvious local impacts and issues. We hope you will help us build local opposition, beyond the significant level that already exists. This project doesn't make sense, and it's already struggling. Local opposition could make a real difference in Washington, as it has before.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Join the 1,200 individual and 260 organizational endorsers of the “Call for Sanity, not Nuclear Production” by scanning the QR code below, or typing [stopthebomb.org](https://stopthebomb.org) into your browser and filling in a short form. If you have already endorsed, help us recruit more organizations, businesses, religious groups, and individuals! Elected officials and other prominent citizens are especially important. It can be surprisingly easy to recruit sign-ons — *if* we ask!
- Write the White House at <https://whitehouse.gov/contact/>, expressing your opposition in succinct terms to LANL's wasteful pit factory. In the past this would have been futile but Congress is paralyzed and the White House is looking for budget cuts. Help guide them to “LANL pits”.
- You can use what you write to the White House in letters to others as well, such as newspaper editors, letters to elected officials, community leaders, and influential persons known to you in one way or another. Many people have never heard of NNSA's big plans for the region.
- Sign up for our bulletins by sending a blank email to [lasg-subscribe@lists.riseup.net](mailto:lasg-subscribe@lists.riseup.net). Learn about upcoming on-line trainings and local meetings.
- If you are passionate and have good people skills, consider being a paid Outreach Associate. Call 505-265-1200 to learn more.
- Volunteer! Be a part of our team! Call us at 505-265-1200 to get started!
- Help support our work financially. Mail a check to our address below or securely contribute on-line at <https://lasg.org/contribute.htm>.



Los Alamos Study Group  
2901 Summit Place NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87106



Scan this QR code and endorse  
the Call for Sanity, Not Nuclear  
Production!

Thank you for your support!  
It really makes a difference!