Government Tries to Avoid Full Analysis of Plutonium Bomb Plans

Your Comment Will Help Compel Important Review

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was one of the first U.S. laws ever written that establishes a broad national framework for protecting our natural world. NEPA requires that all branches of government give proper consideration to the environment prior to undertaking any major federal action that could have a significant effect on it. NEPA also has strict guidelines that incorporate public comment into a federal agency’s decision-making structure.

Tri-Valley CAREs is a vigorous proponent and defender of NEPA. The Department of Energy and its National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) are not. In fact, the agencies’ NEPA motto appears to be “how little can we do?” Witness NNSA’s current plan to massively expand plutonium pit (bomb core) production by fragmenting its NEPA analyses to avoid conducting a full Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement.

The Plan: NNSA announced last year that it intends to more than quadruple the authorized limit for U.S. plutonium pit production. The current limit is production of up to 20 pits per year at the Los Alamos National Lab (LANL) in NM. LANL has had this authorization since a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement decided it in 1996. LANL has never manufactured 20 pits per year. LANL’s highest mark was 11 pits one year. Some years were zero. In recent years, pit production has been on hold due to criticality safety issues. Put simply, the nation has not needed many plutonium pits.

Now, however, NNSA proposes to expand production to 80 or more plutonium pits per year by 2030 and to use not one but two sites. The new plan would “repurpose” the unfinished, scandal ridden MOX (mixed oxide fuel) facility at the Savannah River Site (SRS) in SC to produce 50 or more pits per year. SRS has never had a mission to produce plutonium pits for the stockpile. The workers there do not have the expertise or experience for that highly specialized task. Further, the unfinished MOX facility is reportedly hiding substandard parts in its ductwork and walls. Meanwhile LANL with its major plutonium safety violations is expected to increase its output from the 20 pits per year it never achieved to 30 or more pits per year by 2030. What could possibly go wrong?

The Detractors: Tri-Valley CAREs has staunchly opposed expanded pit production. We discussed it with Congress during DC Days in May. The House committees that deal with nuclear weapons each took a bite out of NNSA’s request for expanding plutonium pit production. However, the Senate committees passed bills that enabled activities the House had cut, and so the matter will go to conference committee later this year.

This past spring, Tri-Valley CAREs obtained the unclassified summary of a report commissioned by the Defense Department that echoes our concerns. The Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) looked at NNSA’s plans and advised DoD, “No available option can be expected to provide 80 ppy [pits per year] by 2030.” It continued, “DoD should evaluate how to respond to this requirement shortfall.” In plain language, the IDA’s main finding was that NNSA is likely to fail. For its part, NNSA seems oblivious to criticism and allergic to reflection. Instead the agency is charging ahead.

The “Hard Look”: The courts have consistently found that NEPA requires a “hard look” at environmental impacts and at alternatives, including reasonable options the agency may not favor. Here it’s instructive to look at what’s behind NNSA’s push for expanded plutonium pit production.

New plutonium pits are actually for new warhead designs with novel features that require pits that are different from anything in the stockpile, thereby driving a “need” for fresh production. Right now, Livermore Lab is developing such a warhead.

Livermore is choosing to completely redesign the W78 warhead that sits in silos atop ground-based missiles. The new weapon with new features, formerly known as the Interoperable Warhead 1, is now being called the W87-1. In a report to Congress late last year, NNSA stated that its new-design plutonium pit will be “based on” a well tested design. It’s not the same pit. And the difference is important.

A technical publication, Weapons Complex Monitor, noted on June 4, 2019 that the NNSA’s desired 80 pits per year “are all for the W87-1-style warheads that will top Ground Based Deterrent Missiles.” It’s clear that expanded pit production is not to maintain the safety and reliability of existing warheads in the stockpile. And new nuclear weapons come with serious proliferation risks; indeed their design at Livermore is already adding fuel to the fire of a dangerous global arms race.

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The Alternatives: For starters, the NNSA could nix the new-design W87-1, and instead carefully maintain existing designs, forgoing elective changes that introduce novel features.

Analyses show that plutonium pits remain effective inside nuclear weapons for 100 years or longer. Moreover, there are up to 20,000 “excess” plutonium pits stored at NNSA’s Pantex site in TX. As an alternative to new pit production, existing nuclear weapons could undergo “pit reuse.”

What You Can Do: The NNSA has agreed to conduct three separate NEPA analyses of its pit production plans, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on its plans for the SRS, a lower-level supplement analysis that looks at a 2008 Programmatic EIS and concludes preliminarily that “further NEPA documentation at a programmatic level is not required,” and an unspecified but likely lower level review of pit production expansion at LANL. There will be a public comment period, likely in 2020, on the Draft EIS for SRS.

Right now, and extending until August 12, 2019, you have an opportunity to comment on NNSA’s draft “supplement analysis.” You can ask for a full Programmatic EIS, which is the comprehensive review that NNSA clearly does not want to undertake.

A Programmatic EIS would force NNSA to take that “hard look” at how its plans affect the two sites where the manufacturing would occur, increase transportation risks, and impact the sites that would have to deal with the deadly wastes like the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant. Further, NNSA would have to justify its “purpose and need” for expanded pit production, which involves new nukes.

Please comment using this article, other info at www.trivalleycares.org, and any additional thoughts you would like. Your comments need not be long or technical, but they must be done on or before 8-12-19.

Email your comments to NEPA-SRS@srs.gov. Or by postal mail to Jennifer Nelson, NEPA document manager, NNSA, PO Box A, Aiken, SC 29802. Thank you!
Dear friend of Tri-Valley CAREs,

As you know, our organization is a leader in creating social and political change. We continue to build a strong grassroots movement locally and influence nuclear and environmental policy nationally.

Today I ask you to help us win important victories this year. Your generous, tax-deductible gift in any amount will be put to immediate good use to:

• Prevent the design and manufacture of proliferation-provocative new warheads;
• Curtail the government’s plan to expand production of plutonium bomb cores;
• Strengthen independent oversight and accountability in the weapons complex;
• Give the public a stronger voice in the Superfund cleanup of toxic and radioactive contamination at the Livermore Lab Main Site and Site 300; and,
• Support measures to reduce and eliminate nuclear weapons globally.

Tri-Valley CAREs’ work is unique: By stopping the government’s dangerous new bomb projects, we simultaneously advance nuclear disarmament and protect all of our communities from future nuclear accidents. Our guiding philosophy is that making positive change requires an alert, informed, empowered and active public, and it is to this end that I ask your help today.

Please give as generously as you can! Thank you!

You can make a tax-deductible donation by credit card at www.trivalleycares.org. We have secure portals set up through Network for Good and PayPal, which gives you a choice. Or, send your tax-deductible gift by check to Tri-Valley CAREs, 4049 First St., Suite 243, Livermore, CA 94551.

For peace, justice and a healthy environment,

Marylia Kelley
Executive Director

P.S. In these pages, you will find your invitation to come to Livermore Lab on Hiroshima Day alongside additional news you can use on plutonium bomb cores, Superfund, and more!
On December 11, 1980, the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (Superfund) was enacted by Congress. This new law created a tax on the chemical and petroleum industries in which funds are placed into a trust for cleaning up abandoned or currently active hazardous waste sites. The Department of Energy nuclear weapons facilities subsequently became subject to the Superfund law; however, these federal cleanup sites are funded through the Congressional appropriations process.

The worst and most contaminated of these sites are placed onto a list called the National Priorities List. The Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) Main Site and Site 300 are both on this National Priorities List. For each these LLNL sites, the estimate is that it won’t be until 2060 before the environment is restored. Following active cleanup, at Site 300 there will be contamination left in perpetuity beyond 2060 that will require environmental monitoring. It is less clear if Main Site monitoring will still be required 41 years from today.

Recently, as the group’s legal intern, I had an opportunity to participate in an all-day meeting between Tri-Valley CAREs and Superfund cleanup staff about the progress of the Superfund program at LLNL. Participating with Tri-Valley CAREs were LLNL Superfund staff, National Nuclear Security Administration staff, the Superfund project manager from EPA Region IX, and state Superfund regulators from the Department of Toxic Substances Control and the Regional Water Quality Control Boards. Tri-Valley CAREs organized the meeting as part of its Superfund oversight project. The morning session was devoted to the Main Site, the afternoon to Site 300. Here are some of the key facts I found particularly significant.

MAIN SITE - As a part of the cleanup activities at the Main Site, groundwater wells have been drilled at strategic locations to remove volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, from the groundwater below. The most commonly found VOC is trichloroethylene or TCE. TCE is an industrial solvent that is known to cause cancer and other neurological, immunological, reproductive, and developmental issues. These accidental releases of VOCs and other chemicals are concerning as they could threaten Livermore and surrounding communities’ drinking water supplies.

VOCs can also migrate to the subsurface and become an inhalation risk in the ambient air. In the 2018 annual report on cleanup efforts, 43 kilograms of VOCs were removed from the Main Site. Thirty-two kilograms of these were from groundwater, and a further 12 kilograms were from soil vapor. This removal rate is very similar to what was removed in 2017, with a slight increase in the amount of soil vapor mass removed.

What may be even more concerning is the tritium that was found in the building 419 monitor well. Tritium is a rare and radioactive isotope of hydrogen with a half-life of 12.32 years. This means that the source of the tritium contamination is likely of recent origin. The tritium levels did decrease in 2018, but this may be due to a rise in groundwater levels from a large amount of rain received in 2017. It is imperative that LLNL continues to work to contain and clean up the tritium contamination.

The Main Site contains most of the site’s nuclear weapons design facilities, including the tritium building and the plutonium facility. The Main Site was founded as the nation’s second nuclear weapons design center in 1952.

SITE 300 - Site 300 is the LLNL’s high explosives testing facility. It is located about 17 miles east of Livermore in the Altamont Hills. This facility has been in operation since 1955, and over the years there have been numerous open-air blasts that have contained dangerous toxic and radioactive materials. Site 300 also contains unlined toxic and radioactive waste dumps. Both Site 300 and the Main Site have ongoing weapons programs.

During its time as an operational facility, Site 300’s soil, surface water, and regional groundwater aquifers have been polluted with numerous toxins and radionuclides. These radionuclides include tritium and depleted uranium. It is estimated that the cleanup costs of Site 300 will be around $1.8 billion dollars.

In 2018, at Site 300, a team of geologists from the LLNL collected bedrock samples from 8 locations for analysis of uranium, radium, and thorium isotopes and metals. The goal was to collect un-weathered, unfractured, and coherent rock that was not altered by weather, water, or site contaminants to create a soil background data set for Site 300. Indoor air sampling also took place in 2018 at Site 300. Building 801 was sampled along with resampling of building 833. The results of these sampling tests are still pending.

In the 2019 plan, six new wells are proposed to be drilled at Site 300, along with two wells being decommissioned. These wells serve a similar purpose to the wells at the Main Site. They will be used to help monitor contaminants in the groundwater, as well as subsurface VOCs.

As a resident of Livermore for almost 30 years, the information that I have learned with my time Tri-Valley CAREs is startling. The toxic substances in the groundwater could be potentially devastating to the water supply of Livermore and along with being a danger to the surrounding community. This is why it is so essential that Tri-Valley CAREs continues its mission of ensuring compliance by the Lab and that they continue their cleanup efforts.
The resurgent risks of nuclear war and unresolved climate danger have caused the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists to keep the Doomsday Clock set at 2-minutes to the apocalyptic midnight hour. This is as close to global Armageddon as the clock has been since it was introduced in 1947. By gathering on August 6, we will use the visible power of our presence to transform U.S. policy from violence to peace. JOIN US!

www.trivalleycares.org • www.wsfweb.org
A Peace Camp will be held at a campground south of Livermore in conjunction with the August 6 action

What: A group camp out at a beautiful reservoir, available for one or two nights. Family friendly.

When: Sunday, Aug. 4 and/or Monday, Aug. 5. Confirm check-in times with Scott when you RSVP. At 7:15 AM on Aug. 6, we will caravan to the Lab for the event. (Park gate opens at 5 AM.)

Parking: Scott has some no-charge parking passes for peace campers; carpools are encouraged.

Cost: Tri-Valley CAREs is covering costs; bring your food, swimsuit, art supplies and camping gear.

Details: **RSVP Required**, Scott Yundt, 925-443-7148 or 415-990-2070, scott@trivalleycares.org

Musical instruments welcome • Kids’ action art making (bring supplies) • No pets • No alcohol

**August 6 action co-sponsored by:**

Alameda County Peace & Freedom Party; Asian Americans for Peace & Justice; Beyond the Bomb; Circle of Concern; Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose; Dominican Sisters of San Rafael; East Bay Food not Bombs; East Bay Peace Action; East Bay Women’s Int’l League for Peace & Freedom; East Timor Religious Outreach; Ecumenical Peace Institute/CALC; Grandmothers for Peace, Int’l; Livermore Conversion Project; Marin Peace & Justice Coalition; Mt. Diablo Peace & Justice Center; Nafsi ya Jamii; Niebel-Proctor Marxist Library; Night on the Streets Catholic Worker; No Nukes Action Committee; NorCal Communist Party; Pacific Life Community; Peace Action; Peaceworkers; Pax Christi NorCal; Peninsula Peace & Justice Center; People’s World/Mundo Popular, NorCal; Physicians for Social Responsibility, SF Bay Area; Psychologists for Social Responsibility; SF Friends Meeting, Peace & Social Concerns Cmtee; SJ Peace & Justice Center; Social Justice Center of Marin; Tri-Valley CAREs; Veterans for Peace, East Bay Chapter #162; Western States Legal Foundation; and Xochipilli Latino Men’s Circle.

**The Livermore Conversion Project Nonviolence Guidelines**

We agree to abide by the following guidelines in all of the August 6 actions:

- We will be open and respectful to everyone we meet;
- We will not use verbal or physical violence;
- We will not destroy property;
- We will not bring drugs or alcohol, except for medicinal purposes;
- We will not bring weapons;
- We will not run, which can cause panic;
- If arrested, we will not resist;
- If legal consequences follow our actions, we will treat all those we encounter in the process with openness and respect.

*Adopted by consensus of the planning group for the Aug. 6, 2019 actions at Livermore Lab*
Your Team in Washington DC

Marylia Kelley, Vecky Elliott, Inga Olson and Barbara Dyskant represented Tri-Valley CAREs in Washington, DC the week of May 20th. We were there for the national Alliance for Nuclear Accountability’s 31st annual “DC Days.” We were joined in the nation’s capital by 65 activists who, like us, are directly affected by U.S. nuclear weapons sites. Together, we held more than 90 scheduled meetings with Congress and Administration officials. It was exhilarating – and exhausting – all at the same time.

Our team of four participated in 48 DC Days meetings. We focused on decision-makers with authority over weapons policy and nuclear pollution as both issues have grave consequences for our members who live near the Livermore Lab Main Site and its Site 300 high explosives testing range.

We time our DC Days meetings for maximum impact while Congress is beginning to debate and “mark up” nuclear weapons spending and policy bills. Votes were happening in real time and we had the perfect opportunity to weigh in to stop new nukes like Trump’s “low yield” warhead for submarines and a wholly new warhead that Livermore Lab is designing for land-based silos, which will require a new-design plutonium pit (i.e., bomb core).

The House “mark up” of its spending bill, which happened while we were there, removes all of the money the President requested for the low yield warhead while substantially cutting back funds for expansion of plutonium pit production. *(Stay tuned: We will continue to post analyses and updates for you on the budget process as it continues. See www.trivalleycares.org)*

We also participated in the ANA awards reception held this year in the Rayburn House Office Building. Special commendations were given to Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA), Chair of the House Armed Services Committee, and to several grassroots s/heroes for their courage and noteworthy achievements, ranging from standing up for environmental justice in nuclear waste siting decisions in NM to filing for the release of Grand Jury records at the Rocky Flats Plant in CO, to working tirelessly for cleanup at the Santa Susana Field Laboratory in CA.

Now back from DC, your team is continuing to press forward on the issues.

Moving on Up!

Tri-Valley CAREs recently moved into an office suite that opened up in our same building. Thus our address has changed slightly.

Tri-Valley CAREs
4049 First St., Suite 243
Livermore, CA 94551

Our new office is better able to accommodate our staff and volunteers. Come visit us!

Citizen’s Watch
You’re Invited to Livermore Lab on Hiroshima Day

Tri-Valley CAREs and colleague groups will jointly mark the 74th anniversary of the U.S. atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the Livermore Lab, where the Trump Administration is presently spending billions to create new nuclear warheads.

The Tuesday, August 6, 2019 commemoration is titled, “Designing Armageddon at Livermore Lab: Rally, March and Nonviolent Direct Action for Nuclear Disarmament.”

Participants will gather at the northwest corner of the Livermore Lab (Vasco Road and Patterson Pass Road). The rally will begin at 8 AM and will feature music, speakers, poetry, art and more. There is free parking at the event site.

Daniel Ellsberg will deliver the keynote address. Ellsberg is the military analyst and whistleblower who shone a bright light on U.S. policy and helped end the Vietnam War when he released the Pentagon Papers. Ellsberg published an award-winning memoir in 2017, “The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner.” He remains a brilliant analyst, commentator and sought-after speaker.

Nobuaki Hanaoka, an atomic bomb survivor, will be the rally’s special guest speaker. Hanaoka was an infant when the bomb fell on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945. His mother and sister died from illnesses linked to radiation poisoning and his brother died at age 39 from premature aging associated with fallout from the bomb.

Hanaoka is a retired minister in the United Methodist Church, who came to the U.S. following seminary training in Japan. He has settled in the Bay Area where he speaks, writes and teaches on topics of peace and human rights.

Rafael Jesus Gonzales, the first poet-laureate of Berkeley, and Marylia Kelley of Tri-Valley CAREs will also be featured. Immediately following the rally program, at approximately 9:15 AM, will be a “call to action” in which participants will be invited to march a short distance to the Livermore Lab West Gate. At the gate, Japanese activists will lead a traditional bon dance. Everyone is invited to participate.

Following the dance will be a commemorative die-in and symbolic chalking of the bodies to mimic the “shadows” left by men, women and children vaporized by the A-bomb blast. Those who choose will then peaceably risk arrest. Others will conduct a legal witness and support.

A flyer is enclosed with nonviolence guidelines, vanpool info, and how to RSVP for the August 4th and 5th kid-friendly Peace Camp. Contact marylia@trivalleycares.org or scott@trivalleycares.org for details. We hope you can join us.