

Tri-Valley CAREs

Communities Against a Radioactive Environment

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News release from South Carolina Environmental Law Project (SCELP), lawyers on the plutonium pit issue for Tri-Valley CAREs, Savannah River Site Watch, and Nuclear Watch New Mexico

- see other groups below that supported the letter:

For immediate release, April 21, 2021

Groups Notify Biden Admin of Impending Lawsuit Over Nuclear Bomb Core Plans

Multi-state coalition says DOE's plans to massively expand plutonium pit production violate a major environmental law and constitutes an environmental injustice.

CHARLESTON, S.C. — A coalition of public interest organizations notified (PDF below) the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) urging a comprehensive review of plans to vastly ramp up production of nuclear bomb cores at the Los Alamos National Lab in New Mexico and the Savannah River Site in South Carolina.

In Tuesday's letter to department officials, the groups say this lack of review violates the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and would saddle already-burdened communities nearby the two DOE sites with significant quantities of toxic and radioactive waste, contravening President Biden's executive order of making environmental justice a part of the mission of every agency.

“The federal government appears ready to embark on this significant change in U.S. nuclear policy without studying the cross-country risks and environmental justice impacts, which indicates that the health and safety of workers and downwind and downriver communities are not worth the consideration or protection they deserve,” said **Leslie Lenhardt**, a staff attorney for the **South Carolina Environmental Law Project**, a law firm representing the coalition.

The organizations listed in the letter include **Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, Georgia Women's Action for New Directions, Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition, The Imani Group, Honor Our Pueblo Existence, Tewa Women United, Nuclear Watch New Mexico,**

Savannah River Site Watch and Tri-Valley Communities Against a Radioactive Environment.

The latter three groups intend to file an action pursuant to NEPA within 60 days if DOE and NNSA fail to reconsider its decision. The nuclear watchdogs have reached out on more than five occasions since 2019 to DOE and NNSA over the necessity of a broad, nationwide programmatic environmental impact statement, or PEIS, of producing the nuclear weapon triggers, also known as plutonium pits, at the two sites. In its March 22, 2021 [correspondence](#) (PDF) with the groups, NNSA said it has no plans to revisit its review of pit production, relying instead on a supplemental analysis of an outdated PEIS completed more than a decade ago, along with a separate review done for the Savannah River Site alone.

The coalition has [numerous concerns](#), including the hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars on the line, uncertain future radioactive waste disposal that could strand yet more plutonium in South Carolina, and the risk of lethal accidents, fires, radioactive and hazardous waste releases that could harm the predominantly low-income and African American communities near the Savannah River Site and the Pueblo communities and other minority populations living around the Los Alamos National Lab.

Beata Tsosie, Environmental Health and Justice Program coordinator for Tewa Women United, commented, “It is clear that communities impacted by nuclear colonialism need healing, strength and restorative justice. We know that the environmental violence our land-based and Native Peoples, ecologies and waters continue to endure from nuclear contamination will not end until the harm stops. It is imperative that the Biden Administration conduct a nationwide public review of its plans for expanded plutonium pit production that give affected communities a real voice in fighting for true environmental justice. It is our right that a commitment is made to get this done.”

Marian Naranjo, founder of Honor Our Pueblo Existence, said: “The Los Alamos National Lab is located on a geographically unsafe area for the work that transpires there, a place that is and has been considered as Sacred to Pueblo People since time immemorial.”

Tri-Valley CAREs’ director **Marylia Kelley** highlighted the national implications of NNSA’s decision to expand pit production. “The driver for the program is a novel warhead, called the W87-1, under development at California’s Livermore Lab that requires wholly new components including pits. The W87-1 and a new Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent missile to carry the warhead are both under scrutiny in Congress and within the Administration, which is just beginning its nuclear posture review. NNSA should conduct the necessary programmatic review to help inform these important decisions rather than try to outrun them.”

“To compound the lack of a thorough system-wide analysis of disposal of waste streams from pit production, the politically motivated Environmental Impact Statement on SRS pit production unacceptably waves off Environmental Justice issues without even so much as a cursory analysis,” noted **Tom Clements**, director of SRS Watch. “There is urgent need for preparation of a PEIS that does not marginalize environmental justice issues as a tactic used to justify a second factory to produce plutonium components for provocative and costly new nuclear weapons.”

Jay Coghlan of Nuclear Watch New Mexico commented, “Instead of maintaining the safety and reliability of the existing nuclear weapons stockpile, NNSA may actually undermine it because all future pit production is for speculative new-design nuclear weapons. This is a colossal and unnecessary waste of taxpayers’ money on top of already wasted taxpayers’ money.”

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The South Carolina Environmental Law Project protects the natural environment of South Carolina by providing legal services and advice to environmental organizations and concerned citizens and by improving the state’s system of environmental regulation. Contact: Leslie Lenhardt, (843) 527-0078, leslie@scelp.org

Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety is a 33-year-old non-governmental organization, based in Santa Fe, NM. CCNS works to inform and educate the public, elected officials and the media about DOE activities in New Mexico—at Los Alamos National Laboratory and the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant—impacting public health, water, air and lands. Contact: Joni Arends, (505) 986-1973, jarends@nuclearactive.org

Georgia Women’s Action for New Directions envisions a world without militarism or systemic violence, with just, healthy, secure, and sustainable communities, and in which Georgia is a leader in regional, national, and global movements. They are an independent, community-driven, grassroots, woman-led organization that works on environmental justice issues as they relate to impacts of nuclear projects at the Savannah River Site, including plutonium pit production. Contact: Janie Scott, (404) 524-5999, janie@georgiawand.org

The Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition operates in accordance with the mission of the Gullah/Geechee Nation to preserve, protect, and promote their history, culture, language, and homeland and to institute and demand official recognition of the governance (minority rights) necessary to accomplish our mission to take care of our community through collective efforts, which will provide a healthy environment, care for the well-being of each person and economic empowerment. The Gullah/Geechee Nation spans from North Carolina to northern Florida and receives the downward flow of the Savannah River, which brings its benefits and also could bring disastrous impacts to a community that relies so closely on the water. Contact: Queen Quet, gullgeeco@aol.com

The Imani Group is a Graniteville, South Carolina non-profit founded by Rev. Brendolyn Jenkins Boseman in 2004, to address criminal and environmental justice, as well as youth development. As the founder she has served on the Department of Energy’s Savannah River Site’s Citizen Advisory Board and works to address environmental issues at the Savannah River Site and other sites affecting underserved communities. Contact: Rev. Brendolyn Jenkins Boseman, bjboseman@theimanicgroup.org

Honor Our Pueblo Existence is a nonprofit organization based in Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico, immediately downwind from LANL. We embrace the Pueblo teachings of love, respect and care, working together to improve the life ways of our people in order to provide an enhanced and

sustainable environment for generations to come. Contact: Marian Naranjo, (505) 929-2151, mariann2@windstream.net

Nuclear Watch New Mexico's mission is to: promote safety and environmental protection at regional nuclear facilities; mission diversification away from nuclear weapons programs; greater accountability and cleanup in the nation-wide nuclear weapons complex; and consistent U.S. leadership toward a world free of nuclear weapons. Expanded plutonium pit production will have adverse environmental justice impacts given that the population within the Los Alamos Nuclear Laboratory's 50-mile radius Region of Influence is largely People of Color. Contact: Jay Coghlan, (505) 989-7342, c. (505) 470-3154, jay@nukewatch.org

Savannah River Site Watch monitors a host of projects at SRS from the public interest perspective, with a focus on cleanup of existing waste and plutonium management and pit production. We are attentive to health and safety impacts, especially to workers and populations near to the Savannah River Site and are very concerned that NNSA has summarily waved off reviewing the probable environmental justice impacts from plutonium pit fabrication to minority populations living at the fence line. Contact: Tom Clements, (803) 834-3084, tomclements329@cs.com

Located in the ancestral Tewa homelands of Northern New Mexico, Tewa Women United is a multicultural and multiracial organization founded and led by Native women. Our Environmental Health and Justice Program integrates body, mind, and spiritual awareness into environmental justice advocacy, policy change, and community education while uplifting Indigenous and land-based families and oppressed Peoples to build grassroots leaders and community capacity. Contact: Beata Tsosie-Peña, 505-747-3259, beata@tewawomenunited.org

Tri-Valley Communities Against a Radioactive Environment is a non-profit founded in 1983 by frontline residents around the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) to conduct research, analysis, education and advocacy regarding the environmental justice, health and proliferation impacts of LLNL in California and the U.S. nuclear weapons complex of which it is an integral part. Contact: Marylia Kelley, (925) 255-3589, marylia@earthlink.net
