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Nuclear production on the rise - *County within blast area of Livermore lab*

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It's almost unthinkable, and probably unknown to most residents, that the scenic hills and wide-open fields of Calaveras County are within the blast radius of one of the only nuclear warhead design sites in the United States.

But that was just the kind of information members of the Tri-Valley Communities Against a Radioactive Environment sought to pass along at their Saturday afternoon informational meeting at the Murphys Library.

"Murphys is within 100 miles of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and in case of a severe accident, the prevailing winds do blow east," said Tri-Valley CARE Executive Director Marylia Kelley. "Folks in communities like Murphys don't really ever think about how they can be affected directly by Livermore Lab, but in fact, in a severe accident they could be."

At the meeting, Kelley explained to more than 30 attendees that there are only two laboratories in the United States that design every nuclear weapon in the U.S. stockpile, one being the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. The other is the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico.

"Every U.S. nuclear weapon was designed at one of those two places," Kelley said. "To have one of those two places in Northern California, I think, gives us all a special responsibility to be educated on what goes on at the Livermore Lab and to act upon that knowledge democratically and participate on decision making."

Kelley also brought a wealth of information on the United States' stockpile of nuclear weapons and the increasing budget for and production of nuclear weapons.

Most attendees said they had not been aware of the growing expenditures and production.

Kelley said that the United States and Russia currently hold approximately 95 percent of all the world's nuclear weapons, with both housing around [7],000 different kinds of warheads, and both are continuing to spend billions on nuclear research and production.

"I think that when people know that, irrespective of their political affiliation, that excess is really shocking to most people and most people think that it's wrong," Kelley said.

Thanks in part to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the United States does disassemble roughly 100 retired warheads annually. But the nation is still producing and renovating other nuclear weapons.

“The United States is leading a new arms race, what scientists are calling the dawn of the second nuclear age. This is happening completely outside of the news, but not out of the budget process,” Kelley said. “This is an arms race not about numbers, but about sophistication, about how you can develop a nuclear weapon.”

“Projected over the next 30 years, the U.S. is to spend \$1 trillion modernizing its nuclear stockpile and delivery vehicles,” said Kelley. She said that she expects Russia is following suit. “When you adjust for inflation, we’re actually spending more this year than at the height of any year during the Cold War.”

More than 85 percent of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory’s requested \$1.17 billion budget for 2016 will be used solely for “nuclear weapons activities.” A mere four percent, or roughly \$46 million, will go towards “science,” and less than one percent will be used for studying “energy efficiency and renewables,” “fossil fuel energy research,” and “environmental cleanup” combined.

“This impacts us all in terms of our pocketbooks, how much we pay in taxes, and in terms of nuclear policy and what kind of future we want to see for the world,” Kelley said.

Kelley also said that documents she obtained under the Freedom of Information Act reveal that Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory administrators are beginning plutonium operations [in the National Ignition Facility] without fully analyzing potential health and environmental effects.

“The point is that most people, after the end of the Cold War, believe we stopped spending money on nuclear weapons and stopped the continued development of them,” she said. “We’re at a very dangerous juncture in our own nuclear weapons policy.”

Still, Kelley is hopeful for change. She said that Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-California, has been speaking out against current nuclear policy. Also, Kelley was invited to the third International Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons last year in Austria, where many of the countries that signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons were represented.

Kelley said that South Africa announced during that event that its leaders would consider hosting the next conference.

“I’m really hopeful it will be a turning point of U.S. nuclear policy, and a turning point for the world as a whole turning away from nuclear weapons,” Kelley said of the future conference.

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