

Tri-Valley CAREs

Communities Against a Radioactive Environment

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More Plutonium Coming to Livermore for Increased Nuclear Weapons Activities; Government Quietly Announces Dangerous New Plan in the Federal Register

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The National Nuclear Security Administration, a semi-autonomous agency within the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), announced [its proposal yesterday](#) for “Enhanced Plutonium Facility Utilization” at its Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, located in the densely populated Bay Area. The proposed plan would significantly increase the allowable quantities of nuclear weapons-grade plutonium stored at the Livermore Lab. It would likewise raise the allowable quantities to be trucked in and out of the Lab, using roads and freeways such as the nearby I-580. Further, according to [the Federal Register Notice](#), this sudden change would enable the Lab to conduct riskier operations with plutonium above what is currently authorized. The new plan could also allow increases of other nuclear materials in addition to plutonium.

Scott Yundt, Executive Director at the Livermore-based Tri-Valley Communities Against a Radioactive Environment (CAREs) stated, “This new proposal increases both the likelihood and potential severity of an accident, or intentional destructive act, at the Livermore Lab, which is closely surrounded by houses, apartment buildings, sports fields, and schools. The population within a 5-mile radius of the Lab is approximately 90,000, while more than 7 million people reside within a 50-mile radius.” Yundt noted, “The 50-mile radius is identified in Lab environmental documents as the potentially affected population.”

New Plan Was Left Out of Lab’s Recent Environmental Review

The government’s announcement comes just 12 months after it finalized a Record of Decision, concluding a lengthy public process on its Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement (SWEIS) for “Continued Operations.” This document was intended to disclose and analyze the environmental impacts of the Lab’s ongoing activities over at least the next decade. That document described some increase in plutonium related activities and a small increase in plutonium limits, but purported to keep limits far below the “bomb-usable quantities” that would be allowed under the newly proposed “enhancement.”

“This skirts the intended purpose of the National Environmental Policy Act,” noted Yundt. “The Lab was repeatedly asked in public comment sessions during the year-long SWEIS process if it was contemplated that the Security Category limits at Livermore Lab would change over the next decade to allow for increased quantities of plutonium and a return to the riskier kinds of nuclear weapons activities that used to occur there during the height of the Cold War. And the answer given to Tri-Valley CAREs and the public was a flat ‘no’.

Yundt continued, “It is unfortunate that this change was not included in the SWEIS analysis and public process a year ago. Instead it’s being relegated to a new stand-alone environmental document. This is exhausting for members of the public who are concerned about the Lab’s

activities, forcing them to again engage and grapple with the cumulative environmental impacts of the Lab's actions so soon. This feels like a deliberately induced whiplash."

Plutonium Plan's Short Timeline

The quietly announced Federal Register Notice started the clock on a mere 30-day public comment period on the scope of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement now being prepared. Further, the notice mentions a public hearing will occur, but provides no specific date, time or location, , noting only that it will occur within 15-days from January 13th 2025. In the notice, the purpose and need of the proposal are described as "optimizing" the facility "in support of mission areas including designs of the nuclear explosives package for Life Extension Programs..."

Yundt stated, "This is agency jargon that simply means that the Lab seeks to increase the amount of plutonium on hand to design new plutonium pits, which are the radioactive cores of nuclear weapons. The government elsewhere has proposed to produce 80 or more new plutonium pits annually. This sudden, new scheme at Livermore Lab is timed to support that mission."

Plutonium Security Failed at Livermore Lab

"Livermore Lab has already proven that it cannot keep weapons-usable quantities of plutonium safe," asserted Tri-Valley CAREs' Senior Advisor, Marylia Kelley.

In 2008, Livermore Lab underwent a scheduled force-on-force security drill to test the security of the nuclear weapons usable amounts of plutonium it had at the Plutonium Facility inside the Lab's so-called "Superblock," the most heavily-guarded quadrant on its 1-square mile Livermore Site on East Avenue. The drill was conducted by the DOE Office of Health, Safety, and Security as part of a seven-week audit of the Lab. The mock attack was not a surprise to the Lab, although a real attack would not be scheduled. Still, the mock terrorists were able to gain entry into the Superblock, obtain the nuclear material they sought and hold their ground long enough to detonate a simulated nuclear "dirty bomb." Additionally, a DOE team removed some of the plutonium material, demonstrating that in a real terrorism event, it could have been transported and detonated elsewhere.

"This is how Livermore Lab lost its Category II security. The removal of Livermore Lab's large stock of plutonium was completed in 2012. To this day,, Livermore Lab holds only a lower Category III Security, which restricts the Lab to smaller quantities of nuclear material on site," noted Kelley.

Kelley continued, "It's shocking and dangerous that Livermore Lab management and its overseeing agency plan to bring large quantities of deadly plutonium back to Livermore. Events since 2012 have made weapons-usable quantities of plutonium even less safe here than when the Lab failed its security drill and lost its authorization. For example, the City of Livermore has a larger population, and has extended its boundaries so that the plutonium would now be within Livermore City limits. And, the Lab has recently ramped up its workforce. The bottom line is that more Lab employees and local residents could die due to a terror attack or serious accident. We must ensure this does not happen."

Connections to New Plutonium Pit Production

The United States has not built new plutonium pits on an industrial scale since the Rocky Flats Plant near Denver, Colorado was shut down in 1989 by the FBI for environmental crimes.

However, with a mandate from Congress and recent administrations to “modernize” the US nuclear weapons stockpile, the DOE National Nuclear Security Administration has initiated plutonium pit production for newly designed nuclear weapons, such as the W87-1 warhead. Designed by Livermore Lab, the W87-1 will top the new Sentinel Intercontinental Ballistic Missile. New plutonium pit production has begun at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. Further, a major retrofit of an existing facility at Savannah River Site in South Carolina is proposed as a second plutonium pit production site, with costs recently estimated at \$25 billion.

In November, a South Carolina District Court ruled in favor of plaintiffs Tri-Valley CAREs, Savannah River Site Watch, and Nuke Watch New Mexico in litigation brought against DOE and its NNSA. The court agreed with plaintiffs that the government failed to “programmatically” evaluate the environmental impacts of its proposed enhanced pit production development plans. The judge’s ruling requires the agency to issue a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) analyzing the full impacts of its plutonium pit production plans across the nuclear weapons complex. In theory, this should include the role of Livermore Lab, **where activities in this year’s budget already reflect a 50% funding increase over the previous year for “Enterprise [Plutonium] Pit Production Support”, reaching \$97.35m.** “The new plan’s costs will push this to the billion-dollar mark,” predicted Yundt.

Yundt noted further, “The enhanced plutonium activities suddenly being proposed at Livermore’s Plutonium Facility should be included as part of the nationwide PEIS on plutonium pit production because it is a ‘connected action’ to producing new cores for new nuclear weapons. That PEIS is the appropriate document for a thorough analysis of alternatives in conjunction with the pit production plans in order to evaluate if this Livermore proposal is truly necessary, rather than producing a stand-alone Supplemental EIS focused solely on the Livermore site that may not include any analysis of the pit production mission, even though that is a driver for the decision.”

Tri-Valley CAREs urges members of the public to check its website at www.trivalleycares.org for more information. Tri-Valley CAREs will post the date, time and location for the public hearing as soon as it is announced (and the link if it has a virtual option). Further, we will provide up to the minute details and “talking points” for the public hearing and comment period.

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