

For media inquiries contact: Marylia Kelley, (925) 443-7148, marylia@trivalleycares.org

Livermore Lab at the Crossroad

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Forum this Wednesday on Potentially Illegal Plan to Ship Plutonium Bomb Cores from NM to CA

On January 30, Tri-Valley CAREs will host a forum in Livermore with environmental, legal and nuclear experts from New Mexico and California to discuss a federal proposal to transport plutonium bomb cores from the Los Alamos National Laboratory in northern New Mexico to the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in the Bay Area. Livermore and Los Alamos are the nation's two major nuclear weapons design facilities. The event will be held from 7 PM to 9 PM in the large community room at the Livermore main library, 1188 South Livermore Avenue. Livermore Lab permanently lost its security authorization to handle, use or store bomb-usable quantities of plutonium, including bomb cores, on September 30, 2012. At that time, Livermore Lab changed from a Category I/II security infrastructure to a lesser Category III security posture, which does not allow any nuclear bomb-usable quantities of plutonium on-site. Yet, the U.S. Dept. of Energy (DOE), the agency that owns both weapons labs and mandated the de-inventory of plutonium from Livermore Lab, left a suite of bomb core diagnostics in a service bay in Livermore's Bldg. 334. The DOE now proposes to bring whole plutonium pits from NM to CA to utilize the diagnostics, known as "shake and bake," which consist of a shaker table, thermal unit and drop test. Los Alamos Lab does not currently possess this particular diagnostic suite and Livermore Lab does not possess the security infrastructure to safely handle the plutonium bomb cores, also called "pits".

Tri-Valley CAREs' Executive Director Marylia Kelley commented on plan, "Livermore Lab management appears to be placing its bomb testing desires above public safety. Moreover, DOE is exercising poor planning in leaving the diagnostics behind. The bottom line," Kelley continued, "is that communities should not be put in danger because Livermore Lab has 'plutonium envy' and DOE Headquarters suffers from an abysmal lack of foresight. The government must either decommission the bomb core diagnostics at Livermore or move them to where the bomb cores are located."

Kelley will be speaking at the forum with Jay Coghlan, Executive Director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico. Coghlan and Kelley will report to the community on meetings the two directors held this month in Washington, DC with the Obama Administration and Congress regarding the proposal and its implications for people in both states. Additional presenters include Peter Strauss, an Environmental Scientist and technical advisor on the Superfund cleanup at Livermore Lab, and Scott Yundt, the Staff Attorney at Tri-Valley CAREs.

“The DOE has not conducted any environmental impact statement or review of the safety hazards and potentially catastrophic consequences of its new bomb core testing proposal,” noted Yundt. “This plan to allow plutonium pits to come to Livermore Lab without the necessary security infrastructure violates longstanding environmental laws and the agency's own safety and security regulations,” Yundt continued.

At the forum, experts will outline viable alternatives that will provide increased safety at both facilities and to all of the communities along the transportation route, which spans three states. The Livermore event will be the first public discussion of this proposal.

The forum will also address the Superfund cleanup of leaking toxic and radioactive wastes at Livermore Lab and the contrasting futures that cleanup and plutonium pit testing offer to the community.

"After more than 20 years of active cleanup under the Superfund law, Livermore Lab has removed much of the easily accessible contamination. This is laudable,” said Strauss. “However, the Lab now stands at a crossroad. There is still much radioactive and toxic contamination in areas more difficult to reach and remedy. Livermore Lab can continue with the same methods, with little hope that it will achieve legally-mandated cleanup goals, or it can choose to invest in innovative approaches to remove contaminants in the subsurface soil and groundwater," Strauss concluded.

According to Kelley, “People are understandably outraged that the DOE is moving forward with plans to bring plutonium bomb cores to Livermore. The DOE has not been open and transparent regarding its proposal. This forum will provide an initial opportunity for the community to ask questions, learn more, and make its voices heard.”

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