

ECA Update:  
August 25, 2014



*In this update:*

**Secretary Moniz addresses future of energy, waste disposal**

Idaho Statesman

**Energy secretary pushes for nuclear power**

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

**DOE responds to waste disposal recommendation**

The Oak Ridger

**Congressmen send letter to DOE on behalf of Piketon**

Portsmouth Daily Times

**Audit Report: Integrated Safety Management at the Idaho National Laboratory**

DOE IG

**Cause of New Mexico nuclear waste accident remains a mystery**

LA Times

**Plan to make more nuke pits at LANL raises questions**

Sante Fe New Mexican

**Fired nuclear whistle-blower wins reinstatement order**

Los Angeles Times

**Workers Safely Tear Down Towers at Manhattan Project Site**

DOE Office of Environmental Management

**Nuclear workers learn about medical benefits at town hall meetings**

The Augusta Chronicle

**Secretary Moniz addresses future of energy, waste disposal**

Idaho Statesman

August 21, 2014

[LINK](#)

U.S. Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz spent Tuesday and Wednesday in Idaho Falls keynoting the Intermountain Energy Summit and touring Idaho National Laboratory. The Post Register sat down with Moniz for a brief question-and-answer session.

*Background:*

- Nuclear waste disposal at the Idaho National Laboratory slowed significantly this year after the closing of the Carlsbad, N.M., Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, also

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Oct. 20-24, 2014

known as WIPP.

The underground repository for nuclear weapons waste closed in February after a truck caught fire in an underground tunnel. In a separate incident, 17 WIPP employees were exposed to a radiation leak.

- The Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Repository in Nevada originally was intended to become the long-term storage site for transuranic waste. But the site was closed in 2011 when the Obama administration pulled its funding.
- Without a long-term or short-term storage facility for nuclear waste, Idaho is in danger of missing its deadline in the 1995 Settlement Agreement between Idaho and the federal government, which calls for all transuranic waste to be removed from the state no later than Dec. 31, 2018.

Post Register: Given the temporary closure at WIPP -- and the stalling of the Yucca Mountain -- how can the country move forward in nuclear research without a permanent repository for waste?

Moniz on WIPP: "We are making real progress in understanding what happened and are moving through a recovery plan. We are not prepared to say what set of events led to the radiological incident, but the elements that came together to create the exothermic reaction (the fire) look pretty solid.

"Everything we have seen is consistent with ... but doesn't conclusively say ... only one barrel was involved. If that proves to be the case -- we know exactly what was in the barrel, ... the associated concerns and how to neutralize those problems.

"We are aiming toward an early 2016 restart of operations and then a ramp up. We are still hoping ... to meet to the 2018 Idaho obligation, but that will depend on how the ramp up happens."

Moniz on Yucca Mountain: "We continue to believe Yucca Mountain is not a workable project. The Blue Ribbon Commission Report that was adopted by the administration in January of this year is the path forward.

"We have seen in the Senate and some motion in the House toward authorizing us to start with a consolidated interim storage area -- but we need Congress to act to do that. We will take generic steps, but we need them to authorize us to go forward with a site. We feel confident with authorization we can have a site operating very early in the next decade."

The region's energy future and reducing the carbon footprint

*Background:*

Through the Clean Air Act, the Environmental Protection Agency issues standards, regulations and guidelines to address carbon pollution from new and existing power plants. Section 111 of the Act establishes a mechanism for controlling air pollution from stationary sources, according to EPA.

Post Register: Given the large energy generating potential of the Intermountain

West, what role will this region -- Alberta, Saskatchewan, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and North Dakota -- play in the future of North American energy development?

Moniz on Idaho's future: "Idaho has a largely renewable energy portfolio -- mainly hydro, but also wind and geothermal, but clearly there could be expansion there. (Idaho) has an interesting nuclear future -- NuScale and the small modular nuclear reactor (may) come here. With the major capacity here that would be a really good match and I'm eager to see the reactors deployed."

Moniz on the Intermountain West: "Regionally, there is obviously lots of different kind of resources here, which goes back to the (Section) 111 (d) rule. It's that regional flexibility that will allow Idaho and its neighbors to address lower carbon (emissions).

"This is where the renewable energy position of Idaho could give it an economic advantage compared to other regional solutions (to reducing emissions)."

#### *Long-term energy plan*

##### *Background:*

- The U.S. has passed legislation governing sectors of the energy industry, but no omnibus legislation laying out a comprehensive, long-term energy plan for the entire country has been passed, despite repeated promises by multiple federal administrations.
- The first Quadrennial Energy Review, scheduled for October, is an effort by the Department of Energy to begin developing a multiyear roadmap outlining federal energy policy objectives with the goal of passing a comprehensive plan.

Post Register: What are the challenges facing the federal government and the Department of Energy in developing a national, comprehensive, long-term energy plan?

Moniz on challenge of creating a plan: "I think we are attempting to do this right now -- with the Quadrennial Energy Review. The reality is almost every federal department and agency has major equity in the energy arena. If we don't get all of those threads woven together it's going to be very hard to have a comprehensive approach to energy policy.

"But the White House (through various agencies) has the convening power to bring together all the agencies. And The Department of Energy has the capacity to ... organize meetings, do analysis and bring all the pieces together.

"The idea is over a four-year cycle that we can get a major comprehensive and analytically grounded set of energy proposals. But we aren't trying to bite off the whole thing at once -- for the first year we are looking just at energy infrastructure ... just moving and storing energy.

"Hopefully, the proof in the pudding (that this can be done) will come out in January, when we will have, what we hope, will be the a real step up in how energy infrastructure is looked at and what the federal government can and must

do to help states and regions with energy infrastructure challenges."

## **Energy secretary pushes for nuclear power**

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

August 20, 2014

[LINK](#)

U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz championed the use of nuclear power and urged politicians and leaders in the energy industry to adapt and modernize energy production to help minimize the fallout from global warming.

Moniz stopped to speak in Idaho Falls on Wednesday at the inaugural Intermountain Energy Summit as part of his weeklong tour throughout the West. Idaho's Republican congressmen Jim Risch, Mike Crapo and Mike Simpson also spoke during the conference.

"The predictions of a world where we do nothing predict unhealthy outcomes for our forests," Moniz said. "Working hard on it means innovating energy technology. And I want to emphasize, the goal of energy is very simple, keep the costs down. As we have seen, that will make the policy making easier."

Repeating the Obama administration's "all of the above" energy strategy, Moniz said the United States isn't shunning coal or oil energy sources. Instead, officials are finding ways to reduce their carbon emissions. Moniz added that funding and improving the nation's 17 nuclear research laboratories must also become a higher priority.

Moniz said the U.S. Department of Energy would award \$67 million for nuclear research and development to universities and labs across the country. Idaho will receive \$3.7 million for six projects at the Idaho National Laboratory, Boise State University and Idaho State University.

"I'll be honest, there used to be time where we thought of labs as places to execute tasks," he said. "And they really need to take more of a strategic role. We're having some success with that ... We want the labs to have a regional footprint."

After his speech, Moniz and Risch visited the Idaho National Laboratory's newest research buildings. The modern lab provided stark contrast to the nation's other aging nuclear infrastructure.

Both Moniz and Risch acknowledged the nation's nuclear labs were built decades ago with little improvement since, but they remained optimistic about the future growth of nuclear energy.

Small modular reactors could possibly ease critics' fears that nuclear energy costs too much to be efficient, Moniz said, but many of these are in the early stages of construction so information on long-term operation costs are minimal.

"The 'all of the above' strategy, I think, is embraced by mostly everyone," Risch said. "Particularly here at the laboratory, they have already adjusted to all of the above. This is the lead nuclear facility in America right here in Idaho. As the

future moves forward, there's going to be more and more of a drift to nuclear power, it has to happen."

Risch added that it was his goal to continue to educate lawmakers in Washington, D.C., about Idaho's important role in nuclear energy.

"Without abundant, cheap energy, people cannot get to the lifestyles they need to lead," he said. "We, Idaho, serve a critical role in that."

## **DOE responds to waste disposal recommendation**

The Oak Ridger

August 20, 2014

[LINK](#)

The Department of Energy's Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management (EM) has responded to a recommendation made earlier this year by the Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board (ORSSAB).

In May, the federally appointed citizens' panel recommended that DOE continue to plan for additional on-site waste disposal capacity on the DOE Oak Ridge Reservation (ORR) for low-level radioactive and chemically hazardous waste, according to a news release.

DOE currently operates the Environmental Management Waste Management Facility (EMWMF), a low-level radioactive waste disposal facility in Bear Creek Valley near the Y-12 National Security Complex. When the facility began accepting waste in 2002 it was expected to handle all projected low-level waste from cleanup operations on the ORR. However, with the amount of demolition and work left to complete, EM requires additional disposal capacity onsite.

DOE has conducted a study to develop, screen, and evaluate alternatives for an additional waste disposal facility, with a working name of EM Disposal Facility (EMDF). ORSSAB's recommendation encouraged the agency to continue working toward adding disposal capacity and proposed recommendations for a new facility.

The ORSSAB encouraged DOE to minimize the need for additional on-site capacity when possible. In its response, DOE said it was examining the final cover design of the EMWMF to allow for extended capacity. The waste acceptance criteria for other so-called "sanitary landfills" on Chestnut Ridge are being evaluated for possible modifications to allow a wider variety of waste, the release said.

DOE also said it has practices in place to minimize disposal volumes. The agency uses a hierarchy for dispositioning waste that includes reusing or recycling where possible, followed by the use of the sanitary landfills, the EMWMF, and off-site disposal facilities.

The ORSSAB also recommended that the EMDF have sufficient capacity to accept all future waste generated by DOE cleanup of the ORR. DOE's planning for the EMDF includes projected future remediation waste, plus an additional 25 percent contingency for any uncertainties in volume projections.

The board recommended that the proposed disposal area be engineered to operate

safely and block migration of contaminants into adjacent groundwater, soil, and air. DOE said the facility design will undergo modeling and third-party review to demonstrate regulatory compliance and provide the necessary protection of the environment and human health.

According to the release, the ORSSAB asked that the facility be located in proximity to existing waste burial sites. DOE said the proposed site is near EMWMF and other waste burial grounds. It said locating the EMDF near other disposal areas consolidates the burial sites for long-term stewardship purposes, improves cost benefits, and maintains current greenfield land for unrestricted use.

Finally, the board requested that DOE establish a trust fund for the EMDF similar to one in place for EMWMF. DOE said the expense of a trust fund for long-term stewardship is incorporated in the feasibility study for the facility's life-cycle. The continuation of the trust fund concept is contingent on the State of Tennessee accepting such an agreement, but DOE will be responsible for the long-term stewardship of EMDF either through a trust fund or independently by DOE.

The complete text of the recommendation and DOE's response is available online at <http://energy.gov/orem/downloads/recommendation-223-recommendations-additional-waste-disposal-capacity>.

ORSSAB meets the second Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m. at the DOE Information Center, 1 Science.gov Way, Oak Ridge, Tenn. The meetings are open to the public.

### **Congressmen send letter to DOE on behalf of Piketon**

Portsmouth Daily Times

August 23, 2014

[LINK](#)

Sixth District Congressman Dr. Brad Wenstrup spends most of Wednesday in meetings, in and around the Piketon Department of Energy (DOE) Site about the ongoing issue with funding for Decontamination and Decommissioning (D&D) activities.

Wenstrup joins with other local, state and federal officials who are working to lobby DOE for roughly an additional \$110 million to avoid layoffs from D&D contractor Fluor-B&W Portsmouth.

In addition to meeting with officials locally Wenstrup along with other members of Congress sent a letter to DOE Secretary Ernest Moniz.

"As we have repeatedly urged, the Department of Energy must come forward with a plan that forestalls the proposed layoffs at the site and keeps the D&D cleanup project on track to be completed," the letter reads. "As such, we are writing to request that you come to Piketon, Ohio, and tour the facility before the impending layoffs on October 1. This site is critically important to southern Ohio and merits the Department of Energy's immediate attention. The site and scope of this project are significant, and the cleanup needs are not fully appreciated until viewed in person. The workers and the community deserve answers as the Department's lack of clarity leaves the region facing serious economic uncertainty."

In an exclusive interview with the Daily Times, Wenstrup said what he took away from the Wednesday meetings was, "if you look at all of the entities involved with this, there seems to be a common goal, which is our belief and understanding that this site needs cleaned up. It can be a very productive site and could be one of the energy capitals of America, really."

Wenstrup said his motivation behind inviting the energy secretary to the site is to let them see first hand what's going on at the site.

"If we can get him out here to see what's going on, he might believe in this community the way that we do," Wenstrup said. "That's the problem people sit in Washington and try to tread water, that does not cut it. We're missing a big opportunity if you are looking to the future of not just the area, but of the country."

When asked what it's going to take to get this funding issue resolved Wenstrup said, "that's the multi-million dollar question. I think we really need to make the case of what we can be here and the importance of it."

Wenstrup said congress has, by in large, turned the site over to the Department of Energy.

"Congress certainly has a role in this and the house appropriations (committee) put in \$15 million more than the presidents budget. I put an amendment on the floor, that did not pass but was for another \$15 million," Wenstrup said. "We have bipartisan support from the Ohio delegation on getting this done. Both senators and all of the representatives."

Wenstrup said in the big picture the Department of Energy needs to adjust their priorities for the site.

"In the short term what's going to happen most likely, there is going to be a loss of jobs, that we don't want to see," Wenstrup said. "I still think we need to think big picture, what can take place over the next 20 years rather than just next month."

Wenstrup said one of his meeting on Wednesday was with the Steel Workers Union.

"You talk to the steel workers union and they brought up the point, they are the ones that have to face the people and the people in Washington don't have to do that. Which is one more reason I would like to get them (DOE Secretary) here," Wenstrup said.

Wenstrup's letter to the Energy Secretary was also signed by Bill Johnson and Steve Stivers.

"The Department of Energy must keep its commitment to a timely cleanup effort. The site must be cleaned up safely, quickly, and without costly and unnecessary layoffs that jeopardize the project's success. Again, we urge that you personally visit the Piketon facility. We stand ready to join you at a time and date that fits your schedule," the letter concludes.

## **Audit Report: Integrated Safety Management at the Idaho National Laboratory**

DOE IG

August 18, 2014

[LINK](#)

The Department of Energy's Idaho National Laboratory (INL) employs three main contractors to perform the majority of its work. Much of this work involves hazards that pose risk to employees and the environment. In September 2013, the Secretary of Energy reaffirmed the Department's commitment to protect the health and safety of employees, those residing in communities where the Department operates, and any others affected by the Department's work. Given the Department's emphasis on safety, we conducted this audit to determine whether the Department had fully implemented Integrated Safety Management (ISM) at the INL.

In response to significant safety events in recent years, the Idaho Operations Office (Idaho) and its contractors have taken a number of steps to fully implement ISM into site work processes. In particular, between Fiscal Years 2011 and 2013, a number of events, some of which were serious, occurred at all three contractors that pointed to weaknesses in certain ISM core functions. We noted that Idaho and its contractors made notable improvements to ISM core functions and emphasized the responsibility of all employees for safety. However, we also noted certain weaknesses with safety analyses, supervision and safety controls.

Management at Idaho is well aware of the problems, and is taking or has begun to take appropriate actions. Therefore, we are not making formal recommendations in this report. However, we suggest that the Manager, Idaho Operations Office continue to improve the annual Documented Safety Analyses review process, ensure adequate supervision and reinforce the need for engineered controls

## **Cause of New Mexico nuclear waste accident remains a mystery**

LA Times

August 23, 2014

[LINK](#)

A 55-gallon drum of nuclear waste, buried in a salt shaft 2,150 feet under the New Mexico desert, violently erupted late on Feb. 14 and spewed mounds of radioactive white foam..

The flowing mass, looking like whipped cream but laced with plutonium, went airborne, traveled up a ventilation duct to the surface and delivered low-level radiation doses to 21 workers.

The accident contaminated the nation's only dump for nuclear weapons waste -- previously a focus of pride for the Energy Department -- and gave the nation's elite ranks of nuclear chemists a mystery they still cannot unravel.

Six months after the accident, the exact chemical reaction that caused the drum to burst is still not understood. Indeed, the Energy Department has been unable to

precisely identify the chemical composition of the waste in the drum, a serious error in a handling process that requires careful documentation and approval of every substance packaged for a nuclear dump.

The job of identifying the waste that is treated and prepared for burial will grow even more difficult in the years ahead when the Energy Department hopes to treat even more highly radioactive wastes now stored at nuclear processing sites across the country and transform them into glass that will be buried at future high-level dumps.

The accident at the facility near Carlsbad, N.M., known as the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, or WIPP, is likely to cause at least an 18-month shutdown and possibly a closure that could last several years. Waste shipments have already backed up at nuclear cleanup projects across the country, which even before the accident were years behind schedule.

A preliminary Energy Department investigation found more than 30 safety lapses at the plant, including technical shortcomings and failures in the overall approach to safety. Only nine days before the radiation release, a giant salt-hauling truck caught fire underground and burned for hours before anybody discovered it.

The report found that "degradation of key safety management programs and safety culture resulted in the release of radioactive material from the underground to the environment."

The 15-year-old plant, operated by a partnership led by San Francisco-based URS Corp., "does not have an effective nuclear safety program," the investigation found.

The accident raises tough questions about the Energy Department's ability to safely manage the nation's stockpiles of deadly nuclear waste, a job that is already decades behind schedule and facing serious technical challenges.

"The accident was a horrific comedy of errors," said James Conca, a scientific advisor and expert on the WIPP. "This was the flagship of the Energy Department, the most successful program it had. The ramifications of this are going to be huge. Heads will roll."

There is no official estimate of the cost of the accident, but outside experts and a Times analysis indicate it could approach \$1 billion, based on the WIPP's annual budget; the need to decontaminate the facility; upgrades to safety that officials already have identified; and delays over the next decade in the nuclear weapons cleanup program.

The WIPP was designed to place waste from nuclear weapons production into ancient salt deposits, which would eventually collapse and embed the radioactivity for at least 10,000 years. The dump was dug much like a conventional salt mine, but with a maze of rooms for the waste. It handles low- and medium-level radioactive materials known as transuranic waste, the artificial elements -- mainly plutonium -- created in the production of nuclear weapons. Until the Valentine's Day disaster, it had been operating without significant problems for 15 years.

The plant's ventilation and filtration system was supposed to have prevented any of the radioactive material from reaching the environment. But investigators

discovered that the Energy Department never required the ventilation system to meet nuclear safety standards. When monitors detected radiation, dampers were supposed to route the ventilation air into filters to prevent any radioactivity from reaching the surface, but the dampers leaked and thousands of cubic feet of air bypassed filters.

Luckily, the accident occurred when nobody was working in the mine itself. But the emergency response moved in slow motion.

The first high-radiation alarm sounded at 11:14 p.m. When control room managers tried to find the responsible on-call radiation control expert, they couldn't find the person, according to the investigation report. By morning, workers were attempting to change filters. Not until 9:34 a.m. did managers order 150 or so workers on the surface of the site to move to a safe location, about 10 hours after the first alarm sounded. It took 13 hours for managers to staff an emergency operation center.

"The accident was a horrific comedy of errors. This was the flagship of the Energy Department, the most successful program it had. The ramifications of this are going to be huge." - James Conca, a scientific advisor and expert on the WIPP

The radiation doses the workers received during the hours after the accident were a small fraction of the allowable occupational limits and the workers should have no health impacts, Energy Department officials said.

Although WIPP operating procedures were faulty, the drum itself did not cause the accident. The steel drum was packaged at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. The drum principally contained nitrate salts, a byproduct of the chemical process that extracts plutonium, used in the triggers of hydrogen bombs.

Investigators believe that some chemical or packaging change was made at Los Alamos, and they are looking at whether that change was ever approved by senior laboratory chemists. A team of experts from WIPP may also have missed the change.

The investigators are looking at a variety of materials that may have been added to the drum, including lead, tungsten, acid and even kitty litter as possible factors in the explosion.

"They haven't been able to duplicate the reaction in a laboratory," said Ed Lyman, a physicist with the Union of Concerned Scientists. "There is no guarantee that they won't have another event in the future. The larger question here is how well they characterize nuclear waste so it will be safe."

Other drums of the same material are still at the WIPP, as well as in storage at Los Alamos and at a private dump in Texas, and nuclear experts say another leakage accident cannot be ruled out.

Robert Alvarez, a former assistant energy secretary and a recent critic of the department's performance, said the risk of a radioactive release at the WIPP was supposed to be one event every 200,000 years, not one in 15 years. "This was a cardinal violation," he said.

Conca, among others, argues that the fundamental technology of the WIPP is sound, and he hopes officials do not overreact to the accident. But under the best of circumstances, the WIPP will probably be closed for 18 months, a shutdown that is causing concern in states that are already impatient with the Energy Department's slow cleanup schedule.

At the Idaho National Laboratory, there are concerns that the WIPP closure could prevent the Energy Department from fulfilling its legal agreement to remove all transuranic waste by 2018. Curt Fransen, chief of the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, said federal officials had begun discussing building new warehouses at the lab to store waste as a result of the WIPP accident.

At Washington state's Hanford Site, the WIPP closure may lead to additional delays in shipping out 8,841 drums, boxes and other containers of transuranic materials to the New Mexico plant, said Deborah Singleton of the state's Department of Ecology.

In Carlsbad, the closest city to the WIPP, officials have voiced support for the economically vital dump, but they also are worried about safety. When Energy Secretary Ernest J. Moniz went to Carlsbad this month, Jay Jenkins, president of Carlsbad National Bank, told him at a town hall meeting that he did not think the WIPP had adequate funding to ensure safety.

Moniz acknowledged such concerns, promising to ensure the future safety of the plant.

"You stick with us, and we're sticking with you," Moniz said.

### **Plan to make more nuke pits at LANL raises questions**

Sante Fe New Mexican

August 23, 2014

[LINK](#)

Los Alamos National Laboratory, birthplace of the atomic bomb, could ramp up production of triggers for nuclear weapons to levels not seen since the Cold War, if federal defense and energy officials get their way.

The federal government sees the site atop a rugged canyon cliff overlooking the vast expanse of plateaus and distant hills in Northern New Mexico as the perfect place -- really, the only one -- for an ambitious mission to massively increase production of plutonium pits -- the softball-sized cores that can have the explosive power of the Nagasaki bomb. The pits are used to set off thermonuclear reactions in weapons tens of thousands of times more powerful than the pits themselves. The new pits would not be used for new weapons, proponents of the plan say, but to replace aging pits in the nation's nuclear stockpile.

But questions abound over the proposal. Foremost among them: Are more pits needed? Thousands of pits already are warehoused at a storage facility in Texas that scientists say could be used to supply the needs of the nation's nuclear industry for many decades.

There are also questions about the costs of increased production, whether Los

Alamos has the space to increase production and whether the lab has the ability to safely house the dangerous and delicate war-grade plutonium required to produce the weapon components. The lab facility designated for pit production at Los Alamos is considered too small for the levels of production officials propose, and it sits over a seismic fault.

In a report to lawmakers this month, the Congressional Research Service describes a national defense agenda to produce 30 war reserve plutonium pits per year by 2026, and up to 80 pits per year by 2030.

To put the magnitude of the strategy in perspective, the U.S. has produced a total of 30 pits -- all at Los Alamos -- between 2007 and the present. Before that, domestic pit production had been at a standstill since 1989, when federal agents stormed the Rocky Flats Plant in Colorado to investigate environmental crimes and the facility was shuttered. Rocky Flats had produced up to 2,000 pits annually during the Cold War.

One nuclear watchdog familiar with the idea said the mission at Los Alamos carries the further risk of eroding the trust of countries that, along with the United States, have committed to drawing down their nuclear stockpiles.

"There's a financial cost. There's an environmental cost. There's a cost to our identity as a country, and there's a cost to our international credibility in nonproliferation," said Greg Mello, executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group.

In the years following the closure of Rocky Flats, a combination of the shutdown and international treaties prohibiting the production of new nuclear weapons halted production of plutonium pits in the U.S. for nearly two decades. Production resumed in 2007, but only at Los Alamos, which produced 11 that year. The lab has never produced more than six in any year since then.

But the same nonproliferation treaties that halted the production of new weapons also prohibited the testing of existing stockpiles. Those provisions have created uncertainty about the reliability of the aging bombs.

One popular analogy among frustrated factions in national defense circles likens the stockpile to a rusty old car in a driveway. It might unexpectedly need to be driven someday, but turning the key to test whether it will start is strictly forbidden.

The U.S. Department of Defense, some in Congress and the National Nuclear Security Administration -- an arm of the Department of Energy that manages the country's nuclear weapons program -- want to replace aging triggers with new ones to ensure the weapons will work if they're ever needed.

A debate has raged for years between nuclear hawks and nonproliferation advocates about whether the pits need updating. Mello and other skeptics point to a 2006 report from the JASON Defense Advisory Panel, an independent scientific group, that said the useful life of a plutonium pit is up to 100 years. That would give many of the existing pits another half-century before they would need to be replaced.

For subscribers to that theory, the roughly 15,000 plutonium pits manufactured at

Rocky Flats and stored at the Pantex Plant in Amarillo, Texas, are already more than enough.

But proponents of increased production, including some members of Congress, say it is critical to have an arsenal they know will work. And having new pits would provide that confidence.

"Modernization of infrastructure and a robust plutonium science and technology program are key to our ability to respond to emerging issues and threats, to ensure safety of our facilities and personnel, and to assure the safety, security and effectiveness of the U.S. nuclear deterrent," said Kevin Roark, a spokesman for the lab, which supports the plan.

The Republican-controlled U.S. House of Representatives believed enough in the stepped-up pit production plan that it included it in the defense authorization bill adopted for fiscal year 2015.

The Congressional Research Service report makes it clear that Los Alamos is the front-runner -- if not the sole candidate -- to house those activities. It describes Plutonium Facility 4, or PF-4, at Los Alamos as "the only building in the United States with the combination of attributes required to make pits."

But the building, constructed in 1978 over a seismically active fault, would need expensive modifications to make it big enough and safe enough for increased production, the report said.

In comments at the National Republican Club of Capitol Hill in Washington last year, Jack Mansfield, a member of the federal Defense Nuclear Facility Safety Board, called the building "brittle" and not sufficiently constructed to survive a serious earthquake.

"There is a probability, albeit small, that the building could collapse with great loss of life within and with dispersal of plutonium," he said.

Another building at the lab also would have to be retrofitted to safely store between 400 and 1,760 grams of plutonium for increased production, the report says. The building is currently designed to hold 26 grams.

The congressional report makes no recommendations about how the nuclear defense complex should proceed with the strategy to increase pit production and doesn't speculate at the cost. Rather, it poses questions for Congress to consider about the steps and associated costs necessary to execute the plan.

"With NNSA, Los Alamos National Laboratory is exploring a wide spectrum of options to fulfill our mission commitments to plutonium manufacturing," LANL spokesman Roark said. "While using existing facilities both at Los Alamos and across the complex is a short-term solution, it is not sustainable for the long haul."

Mello questions the report's conclusion that Los Alamos is the best place to do the work. But he thinks the report makes clear that the decision already has been made.

"Nobody should doubt that this is a high-hazard industrial operation," he said. "The bigger it is, the more complicated it is, the more likely it is that there will be accidents."

Mello worries the shifting international landscape of nuclear posturing -- Iran's capability to produce weapons and unknowns about Russia's intentions in Ukraine -- will be leveraged to convince some members of Congress to support the plan.

And he expects little resistance from New Mexico's members of Congress, who have been largely mum on the plan.

"The citizens of Santa Fe have to wake up and realize that the identity of their metro area is tied up in this," he said. "It would only take one disaster to end community development."

Of the state's five-member congressional delegation, only the offices of U.S. Sen. Tom Udall and U.S. Rep. Ben Ray Luján, both Democrats, answered The New Mexican's questions about the plan.

Jennifer Talhelm, a spokeswoman for Udall, said the senator supports reducing the number of nuclear weapons around the globe, but also supports replacing weapon components to ensure the safety, security and reliability of the U.S. stockpile.

"Los Alamos is the only lab capable of this work," she said.

Luján said he also embraces nonproliferation, but he believes the existing stockpile should be well maintained, and that Los Alamos should play a big role in that.

But he did not commit to a firm position on the plan described in the report and said Congress should proceed cautiously.

"While this report discusses many of the factors that go into pit production, there are a number of questions that remain," Luján said, "along with the need for significant discussion and research to determine the best path forward."

### **Fired nuclear whistle-blower wins reinstatement order**

Los Angeles Times

August 20, 2014

[LINK](#)

The U.S. Labor Department ordered the reinstatement of an environmental specialist at the former nuclear weapons complex at Hanford, Wash., saying she had been wrongfully fired.

Shelly Doss, an employee of Washington River Protection Solutions, was fired in October 2011 after she had reported federal and state environmental violations at a cleanup site at Hanford.

Doss is one of a number of employees who have been fired, driven out or

harassed for raising safety concerns at the facility, according to Hanford Challenge, a watchdog group.

Doss had worked at the project for 20 years. She previously had filed a harassment claim and reached an agreement with the company, which is majority owned by San Francisco-based engineering and construction firm URS Corp.

The Labor Department's finding, which was delivered this week, found that "every time complainant voiced an environmental or nuclear safety concern, respondent took her off of that project until she hardly had any work assignments left. Complainant was slowly stripped of her job duties."

Even though their name is "Washington River Protection Solutions", the actual part of providing solutions & protecting the environment became too expensive, not profitable... cut into pay, bonuses & share value... Bummer when greed takes over.

Under the decision, Doss would be reinstated to her former job, as well as receiving back pay, \$20,000 for emotional distress and \$10,000 for "callous disregard" of her rights.

Washington River Protection Solutions said it was reviewing the decision.

"The employee was one of more than 200 employees who were laid off by the company in the fall of 2011 to align its employment levels with project work scope and federal funding," the company said in a statement. "The employee's raising of safety or environmental questions was not a factor in the selection for lay-off."

The company, which said its employees were "empowered and encouraged to raise safety or other workplace concerns," said it had not made a decision on whether it would request a hearing on the matter before an administrative law judge. The parties have 30 days to request a hearing.

The cleanup of the Hanford site, which has 177 underground tanks containing highly radioactive sludge, is the nation's largest environmental cleanup with a projected price tag of more than \$100 billion.

Two senior scientists employed by URS at the project, Walter Tamosaitis and Donna Busche, also have been fired.

Tamosaitis, who was in charge of research and led a large team of scientists, had raised concerns about the safety of mixing technology that was critical to a nuclear waste treatment plant at the facility.

He was relieved of his management job, put in a basement room without a telephone or office furniture and given no work assignments. He was later fired.

Busche, head of nuclear safety, asserted the project had violated a broad range of safety measures in the plant design.

The treatment of whistle-blowers at Hanford has gained high-level attention in Washington, including by Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz.

Sen. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), a member of the Environment and Public Works Committee, said: "It's time to reinstate the other Hanford whistle-blowers who've been wrongfully removed and establish a culture that allows employees to express their professional concerns about the design and construction of the facility without fear of reprisal or retaliation."

### **Workers Safely Tear Down Towers at Manhattan Project Site**

DOE Office of Environmental Management

August 21, 2014

[LINK](#)

LOS ALAMOS, N.M. - After decades dominating the Los Alamos National Laboratory skyline, two water towers were safely demolished by workers in a matter of hours recently, bringing EM's Environmental Projects Office at Los Alamos a step closer to transferring the land for future commercial or industrial use.

The towers were located in Technical Area 21 (TA-21), an early site of the Manhattan Project work at the laboratory, which is part of DOE's network of national laboratories. It was the location of the world's first plutonium processing facility and where groundbreaking tritium research took place.

The demolition is a continuation of a large-scale environmental cleanup at TA-21 that began in 2009 when cleanup was funded by the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act. Demolishing the 175-foot and 160-foot towers was one of several projects to remove remaining structures at TA-21.

"By bringing down these towers, we are making a noticeable difference in the skyline at Los Alamos," Los Alamos Field Office Environmental Programs Assistant Manager Pete Maggiore said. "This is another positive step towards eventual transfer of this property to Los Alamos County."

The demolition project hired contractor The Lakeworth Group LLC of Los Alamos, a woman-owned small business, which was supported by Envirocon, a demolition contractor that has performed similar work at other EM sites.

Workers safely brought down the towers using a controlled demolition method landing the towers in safe designated locations. Disposition of the materials left by the demolitions includes scrap-metal recycling in a facility located in Albuquerque, N.M., which provides a financial credit to the project cost and contributes to environmental sustainability goals. The towers were uncontaminated and in a non-posted area.

### **Nuclear workers learn about medical benefits at town hall meetings**

The Augusta Chronicle

August 20, 2014

[LINK](#)

"It made my life a whole lot easier," said Sullivent, of Harlem. "I wouldn't have been able to retire if I didn't have the financial assistance."

Sullivent attended a town hall meeting Wednesday at the North Augusta Municipal Building, where Department of Labor officials presented information on the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program. The program began in 2001 to compensate nuclear workers for work-related medical expenses.

Hundreds, mainly former Savannah River Site employees, attended two meetings to learn more about filing claims. Rachel Leiton, the director of the program, said by phone Wednesday that the meetings were an effort to enroll as many eligible people in the program as possible.

"We are constantly trying to reach out to people," she said. "Our goal is to pay people who are eligible."

Common illnesses of people who receive the compensation are lung cancer, beryllium disease, chronic silicosis, asbestosis, emphysema and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, Leiton said.

Claimants can be reimbursed for office visits, prescription medicine, chemotherapy, radiation treatment, medical travel expenses, medical equipment, hospice, home health care and other expenses.

Sullivent, who has COPD, first saw a doctor for shortness of breath in the mid-1980s. He continued working despite his condition so he could support his family. He didn't get consistent medical attention until he started receiving benefits, which have totaled \$105,000 so far.

"I was huffing and puffing," he said. "I had to keep working to pay bills, and I could hardly make it."

More than \$565 million has been paid to 4,315 claimants in South Carolina, and \$210 million to 1,976 claimants in Georgia, according to a Labor Department news release. More than \$10.6 billion has been paid nationwide.

Belton Williams, a retired SRS worker who lives in Aiken, receives compensation for daily medications and oxygen tanks. After 20 years working as an insulator, he has only 45 percent of his lung capacity.

Williams said the program fairly treats workers who contributed to the nation's nuclear programs.

"I'm not taking money out of my pocket," he said. "We were working unaware of things out there that we were working with. They should have let us know hazards of being out there."