

More Plutonium Coming to WIPP and LANL?

Since 1994, the Department of Energy (DOE) has spent billions of dollars and held dozens of public meetings and hearings regarding how to handle up to 50 metric tons of surplus plutonium so that it could no longer be used in nuclear weapons. Russia also agreed to address a similar amount of plutonium from its nuclear weapons program. The U.S. "disposition" program has failed, as plutonium has not been placed into a form to prevent its being used in nuclear weapons, nor is there any likelihood for such a result in the next few years. While not acknowledging its failure, DOE now is proposing for the first time that up to 13.1 metric tons of that plutonium should be shipped to Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) and the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). ***People can speak out against DOE's plans!***

What are DOE's Plans?

On July 27, 2012, DOE released the *Draft Surplus Plutonium Disposition Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SPD DSEIS)*. The preferred alternative is to have the Savannah River Site (SRS) process 6 metric tons of plutonium and ship it to WIPP for disposal with other contact-handled (CH) transuranic (TRU) waste. Some or all of 7.1 metric tons of plutonium in "pits" – the triggers for nuclear bombs – would be shipped from the Pantex Plant in Texas to LANL to be disassembled. The resulting plutonium oxide powder then would be shipped to SRS to be fabricated into plutonium-uranium mixed oxide (MOX) fuel to be used in the Sequoyah (Tennessee) and/or Browns Ferry (Alabama) Nuclear Plants operated by the Tennessee Valley Authority. After responding to public comments, DOE intends to release the *Final SEIS* and Record of Decision (ROD) in early 2013. DOE then plans to begin implementing the chosen alternatives.

Why were LANL and WIPP not in DOE's previous plans?

The *DSEIS* is the fifth in a series of draft and final environmental impact statements regarding what to do with surplus plutonium. In none of the first four EISs was WIPP considered a suitable site for any of the plutonium. The 1996 *Programmatic EIS* and ROD stated that LANL's surplus plutonium would be shipped to Pantex or SRS. The 1999 *SPD Final EIS* and 2000 ROD stated that LANL would fabricate MOX lead assemblies for tests, but that plan was dropped in 2003. Plans at SRS include a \$6 billion (and rising cost) MOX Fuel Fabrication Plant that is under construction, but years behind schedule, and the Plutonium Disassembly and Conversion Facility, which is now being abandoned. The 1996 and 2000 RODs stated that some of the plutonium was to be immobilized and disposed in a high-level waste repository and the rest used for MOX. In 2002, the immobilization program was cancelled "due to budgetary constraints," even though thousands of public comments had opposed MOX and supported immobilization of all the plutonium.

What are concerns about bringing more plutonium waste to WIPP?

Federal laws limit WIPP's mission to 175,564 cubic meters of TRU waste, including 7,079 cubic meters of more radioactive remote-handled (RH) waste. Because of how waste has been shipped to WIPP and placed underground, a significant amount of space has not been used or has been filled with empty containers. Thus, at least 40 percent of the RH waste cannot be disposed as planned. The ten planned panels also may not have sufficient space for the CH waste. The *DSEIS* states that the 6 metric tons of plutonium could be up to 17,000 cubic meters of waste. That amount would approximately double the amount of SRS waste to be emplaced at WIPP. While the *DSEIS* states that amount could fit at WIPP, it might require adding additional panels or displacing CH waste from LANL or other sites that are in the WIPP Inventory. The *DSEIS* states that WIPP does not have the capacity for all 13.1 metric tons of

plutonium. Furthermore, plutonium oxide in pipe overpack containers has never come to WIPP and may contain materials, such as “stardust,” that are not permitted at WIPP.

What are concerns about bringing more plutonium waste to LANL?

LANL already has a mission to clean up TRU and low-level waste at Area G, which is behind schedule and will cost billions of dollars. LANL also has other plutonium production missions that endanger public health and safety. LANL facilities do not meet seismic standards in case of a severe earthquake. Thus, bringing thousands of plutonium pits to LANL would further endanger public health and safety and divert resources away from cleanup.

What alternatives are better than using LANL and WIPP?

Pit disassembly. Do at site(s) that minimize transportation, which does not include LANL.

Immobilization. Surplus plutonium should be immobilized so that it can be safely stored and would be difficult to introduce into nuclear weapons. Immobilization would also be less expensive than MOX. MOX is not a viable alternative as there are no utilities that want to use MOX fuel in existing power plants because of its costs, dangers, and the need to make changes to the reactors.

Storage. Immobilized waste should be safely stored until new disposition options are available.

Disposition. Immobilized waste, and MOX spent fuel if it is used in reactors, will remain dangerous for thousands of generations. Disposition will require development of technical standards before site selection should start. One option is new geologic repositories for surplus plutonium, defense high-level waste, commercial spent fuel and Greater-Than-Class C waste. WIPP’s mission should not be expanded to include those additional missions.

What Can I Do?

Attend the public hearings:

- August 21, 2012 (5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.) Holiday Inn Express, 60 Entrada Drive, Los Alamos.
 - August 23, 2012 (5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.) Courtyard by Marriott, 3347 Cerrillos Road, Santa Fe.
- Spoken public comments will be heard from 6:45 to 8.

Tell DOE: *No additional plutonium should be brought to LANL. WIPP has a limited mission and does not have the capacity for all surplus plutonium. Stop MOX and immobilize and safely store plutonium until technically sound, suitable disposition facilities are available.*

The deadline for written comments to DOE is September 25, 2012. Submit to:

Sachiko McAlhany, NEPA Document Manager, SPD Supplemental EIS, U.S. Department of Energy, P.O. Box 2324, Germantown, MD 20874-2324.

Or by toll-free fax to 1-877-865-0277.

Or by email to spdsupplementaleis@saic.com

The complete DSEIS can be found at:

<http://nnsa.energy.gov/about/ouoperations/generalcounsel/nepaoverview/nepa/spdsupplementaleis>

For more information:

Southwest Research and Information Center. (505) 262-1862. www.sric.org

Citizens for Alternatives to Radioactive Dumping. (505) 242-5511. contactus@cardnm.org

Concerned Citizen for Nuclear Safety. (505) 986-1973. www.nuclearactive.org

Nuclear Watch New Mexico. (505) 989-7342. www.nukewatch.org

August 8, 2012