

Plutonium in Livermore in the News and other Sources

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THE VALLEY TIMES

April 23, 2005

Lab plan doubles amount of plutonium

Summary and Excerpts: A new environmental plan for Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory - the first update since 1992- would allow it to handle twice the amount of plutonium that it currently handles.... The report for the lab by the National Nuclear Security Administration concludes that the lab will be able to increase its plutonium storage from the 1,540 pound standard that has been in place for years to more than 3,000 pounds.... Marylia Kelley, of the lab watchdog group Tri-Valley [CARES] said that "right now, the plutonium facility at the lab is shut down because of safety problems, and it is unconscionable to propose doubling plutonium storage limit at the lab. The DOE should be getting plutonium out of Livermore, not putting more in."

**San Jose
Mercury News**

September 3, 2005:

Security at labs criticized in report

Excerpts: "We believe getting the material out of certain sites where it can't be protected, Livermore being one, should be top priority," said Peter Stockton for the Project on Government Oversight. The oversight group released its own report on the weapons complex in May that point out that security forces at Livermore Lab are equipped with far less lethal and less powerful weapons than other sites with nuclear materials, because of the lab's proximity to suburban neighborhoods.

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February 1, 2005

Safety concerns halt plutonium work

Summary and Excerpts: Potential safety problems prompted a stop of work with plutonium at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory after a federal nuclear agency found taped up cracks in the ventilation system and "hot boxes" without adequate seismic restraints.... "We are not unsafe today, but we need to be in a place where we can project safety into the indefinite future", said Bruce Goodwin, the lab's head of defense and nuclear technology. " In October, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board found problems with the ventilation system and glove boxes used to handle plutonium without exposure during a routine visit to the plutonium facility, known as the "Superblock". "

San Francisco Chronicle

July 15, 2005

Remove plutonium from lab, task force says

Summary and Excerpts: Livermore residents who fear nuclear accidents or terrorist attacks at the weapons lab down the street will be able to breath a sign fo relief if the recommendations of a federal task force are carried out. The report, still in draft form and dated July 13, advises protecting civilain populations by moving plutonium out of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory - where 1,500 pounds of fissionable material are now stored - and shipping it to a centralized lab elsewhere, probably in the American desert.... The draft report comes from the U.S. Energy Department's six member Nuclear Weapons Complex Infrastructure Task Force led by physicist David Overskei of San Diego, chairman of the energy secretary's advisory board.... It noted that four U.S. sites..."are sufficiently close to residential and commerical structures such that any partially successful terrorist attack on these sites may cause collateral damage to the surrounding civilian populations and associated public and private assets." Rep. Ellen Tauscher issued a statement saying: "I welcome many of the ideas" in this report, "which raises important issues that should be part of a larger discussion about the future of our nuclear weapons policy and our weapons complex." *To contact Tauscher by email, go to: www.house.gov/tauscher/IMA/get_address.htm*

ContraCostaTimes

March 25, 2005

Nuclear materials in unsafe packages

Summary and Excerpts: Lawrence Livermore Lab has been storing plutonium in potentially unsafe containers such as paint cans and food pack cans, according to a report this week by the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board. The board is urging Secretary of Energy Samuel Bodman to improve packaging and storage of nuclear materials at Livermore and other Department of Energy sites following a recent review of nuclear materials. The recommendation, sent to DOE March 10, notes some plutonium at Livermore is stored in "thin-walled tinned carbon steel containers used in the food industry" with no modifications for nuclear materials — paint cans with press-fit lids and cans with slip lids that are often kept closed with tape. *For more info: see 70 FR 13482 (Monday, March 21, 2205)*

What Government Agencies Recommend

Secretary of Energy Advisory Board, U.S. Department of Energy, Recommendation for the Nuclear Weapons Complex of the Future, July 13, 2005, Draft Final Report

(Page 2, last sentence, paragraph 1) “With physical security costs approaching 15 percent of the budget, the benefits of special nuclear materials consolidation are substantial, both in terms of reducing capital and operating costs as well as reducing risk to the adjacent civilian populations.”(introduction page vi, bullet 3) “Within the Complex, the physics design laboratories aggressively seek independence rather than cooperative interdependence, resulting in redundant programs and facilities.

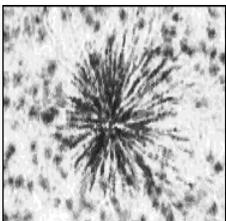
NNSA Security, An Independent Review, April 2005

The report says: “It appears that some special nuclear materials (SNM) are being stored at some DOE/NNSA sites more for convenience than necessity. Some sites perceive that SNM holdings are inextricably tied to their missions. Some quantities of nuclear materials are stored to allow scientists access to their work; however, moving this materials to more secure and remote sites, and bringing the scientists and mission to the material would decrease the number of storage locations and consolidate SNM in more secure, un-populated areas.”

From DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD July 8, 2005 Site Report for Livermore Laboratory

Plutonium Facility Conduct of Operations: During the past several weeks, the site representative and the Livermore Site Office (LSO) Facility Representative have observed numerous instances of poor conduct of operations in the Plutonium Facility. Most cases involved a failure on the part of facility personnel to follow procedures. In the most recent case, facility personnel did not respond immediately to a continuous air monitor alarm in a laboratory room. The alarm was also not properly recorded in the facility alarm log. On other occasions, the Facility Representative has identified numerous deficiencies in the recording of facility data in logs as required by facility procedures. On June 29, 2005, the Livermore Site Office Manager issued a letter to LLNL expressing concern with the procedural violations. LSO noted that the recent events were similar to observations made by an independent oversight inspection last fall that found that facility personnel did not apply sufficient rigor or attention to detail in following safety requirements.

For more information see: www.dnfsb.gov/pub_docs/llnl/wr_11.html



Particle of Plutonium

The black star toward the top of the picture shows the tracks made by alpha rays emitted from a particle of plutonium-239 in the lung tissue of an ape. The alpha rays do not travel very far, but once inside the body, they can penetrate more than 10,000 cells within their range. This set of alpha tracks (magnified 500 times) occurred over a 48-hour period. The plutonium particle that emitted them has a half-life of 24,400 years.

-- from the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory, Berkeley, California

What Other Non-Governmental Organizations Say

The following section the relevant parts from the Project on Government Oversight's (POGO) Report. Generally see the Oversight Report from the Project on Government Oversight at <http://www.pogo.org/p/homeland/ho-050301-consolidation.html>. For information on the livermore specific part of this: <http://www.pogo.org/p/homeland/ho-050301-consolidationB.html#livermore> (Click into this link and you can get the report's masthead and title.

Roughly seven million people live within a 50 mile radius of the Livermore Lab. In fact, many residential homes now exist across the street from the Lab's fence line, and new townhouses with mini-vineyards are being built along the edge of the fence line. These homes sit only 800 yards from the Superblock, which houses the Lab's plutonium. If a terrorist group detonated an Improvised Nuclear Device at the Lab, the San Francisco Bay Area and inland regions – the key agricultural areas of California – could be devastated. These consequences appear to have been lost on the NNSA. In February 2004, the NNSA proposed doubling Livermore's plutonium to 1,500 kilograms.

According to DOE documents, as well as interviews POGO has conducted with numerous DOE security experts about Livermore, the Lab's security is marginal. Surprisingly, the protective forces at Livermore are issued far less lethal and less powerful weapons than protective forces at other sites that store the same Special Nuclear Materials. Security personnel also lack breaching explosives (used for breaching doors or creating holes in the side of the building), which they would need to use if terrorists barricaded themselves inside a storage vault or lab to construct an improvised nuclear bomb or prepare a radiological dispersal device.

The security at the site is so inadequate that, in February 2003, a one-ton truck crashed through the perimeter security fence at Livermore and the neighboring Sandia California facility, and was able to travel "a considerable distance inside the site security perimeter" before being stopped by security. The DOE's Inspector General discovered that ten months after pop-up barriers had been installed at a cost of millions of dollars, the NNSA had still not authorized their activation.

Department officials state that the security force is not armed with more lethal weapons because the Lab is bordered by residential neighborhoods. As one former senior Department security official told POGO, "The [Department] and the Livermore neighbors are concerned about the use of automatic weapons and small explosives. But what are their concerns about radiological sabotage or an IND [a nuclear explosion] in their neighborhood?"

POGO'S RECOMMENDATION: Remove all weapons-grade plutonium and highly-enriched uranium from Livermore. The current shut-down at the Superblock is the perfect opportunity to prepare a path for de-inventorying the Lab of Special Nuclear Materials. If Livermore continues to need some amount of this material for its mission, the required material should be stored at the Device Assembly Facility in Nevada, only an hour's plane ride away. Livermore scientists who need to work with the material can travel there to conduct research, something they did for years during the nuclear testing program.

For more information go to: <http://www.pogo.org/p/homeland/ho-050301-consolidation.html>

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