

BAD IDEA: Plutonium in the National Ignition Facility. An Emergency Call to Action

The Livermore Lab has announced that it plans to begin plutonium experiments in the National Ignition Facility later this month. Tri-Valley CAREs has obtained some of the plans. Here are 10 good reasons why it's a bad idea.

1. The Lab has not figured out how to conduct the shots without contaminating the entire NIF target chamber, which differs from the original plan.
2. There will be at least 100 to 120 of these plutonium shots, conducted over a 10-year span. So the impacts involve many shots, not just one.
3. Lab documents say the experiments may "generate airborne contamination that exceeds the derived air concentration" (i.e., the legal limit). This plutonium would be outside the NIF target chamber.
4. The plutonium experiments may also contaminate the laser optics. Lab reports say that the "efficacy" of cleaning plutonium debris off the NIF optics is uncertain.
5. Contaminating NIF with plutonium may make the facility unfit for unclassified experiments.
6. Estimates for machining one plutonium target for use in a single NIF experiment reach into the tens of millions of dollars.
7. It is unclear how much scientists will discover about plutonium-239 by conducting experiments at NIF with plutonium-242, as planned.
8. Experiments using plutonium-239 are conducted elsewhere, including at Z (Sandia, Albuquerque) and U1a and JASPER (Nevada).
9. Despite Lab management protestations to the contrary, this is "make work."
10. These plutonium shots without containment are substantially different from anything planned previously - and are about to take place without any fresh environmental review.