

Tri-Valley CAREs

Communities Against a Radioactive Environment

2582 Old First Street, Livermore, CA 94551 • (925) 443-7148 • www.trivalleycares.org



*Peace Justice Environment
since 1983*

For Immediate Release: Wednesday, January 28, 2015

Tri-Valley CAREs & NRDC Ask Energy Secretary to Halt Plutonium “Shots” in NIF Scheduled to Begin Thursday at Livermore Lab

Groups’ Attorneys Cite Unaddressed Plutonium Exposure Risks and Nuclear Non-Proliferation Concerns

LIVERMORE, CA AND WASHINGTON, DC – Citing potential risks to public health, the Livermore-based Tri-Valley CAREs (Communities Against a Radioactive Environment) and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) are calling on the U.S. Secretary of Energy to immediately cancel highly secretive experiments involving plutonium at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory’s National Ignition Facility (NIF) mega-laser. Government documents released to Tri-Valley CAREs under the Freedom of Information Act reveal that the experiments will be conducted without an inner containment vessel in the target chamber to capture the plutonium debris.

The urgent request was made in a 10-page letter yesterday to the Department of Energy (DOE) by the Washington, DC law firm of **Meyer, Glitzenstein and Crystal**, acting as counsel for the environmental groups.

“Livermore Lab plans to zap plutonium with lasers in NIF with the clear risk of contaminating the laser optics and target chamber, and potentially exposing workers and the public to plutonium,” charged **Marylia Kelley**, Tri-Valley CAREs’ executive director and a long-time Livermore resident. “Before these controversial experiments begin, at a minimum, we believe the government must undertake a stringent environmental review and solicit public comment pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act.”

Dr. Matthew McKinzie, a physicist and the director of NRDC’s nuclear program, noted, “The planned use of plutonium in NIF raises serious non-proliferation concerns. Indeed, NIF construction and operation was predicated on agency assurances that plutonium would not be used in experiments, as evidenced in NIF’s 1995 Nonproliferation Report.”

Plutonium is a highly toxic radioactive metal that in some forms can be used to create atomic weapons. The government said it may conduct up to 120 plutonium experiments, also called shots, at the NIF facility.

The letter urgently requests that before any plutonium experiments begin, the agency:

- (1) Clearly delineate its plan, timeline, and potential isotopic mixes for plutonium in NIF;
- (2) Publicly describe steps the agency will take to insure the experiments are consistent with non-proliferation objectives; and
- (3) Publicly commit to delaying initiation of the experiments – which may be scheduled to begin as soon as January 29, 2015 – until adequate environmental review is completed.

The groups' letter poses key questions about potential exposure scenarios, and seeks to halt the plan until they are answered. Those impacts include possible airborne contamination; off-site exposure in the event of an accident, earthquake or other natural disaster; the scope of worker exposures due to the inevitable contamination of the NIF target chamber; and, the impact on future civilian science uses of NIF, given contamination resulting from the lack of inner containment for plutonium shots.

"We are hopeful that the Secretary of Energy responds in good faith to our request today, and that he suspends the initiation of plutonium experiments in NIF until the necessary reviews are completed," Kelley concluded.

###

A copy of the groups' 10-page letter is available on the web at:
[www.trivalleycares.org/new/1-27-2015 Letter Re Pu at NIF.pdf](http://www.trivalleycares.org/new/1-27-2015%20Letter%20Re%20Pu%20at%20NIF.pdf)
Or via email from: marylia@trivalleycares.org, or mmcKinzie@nrdc.org