DOE Falters on Health and the Environment

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some of the most critical weapons facilities, and brought the production of new nuclear weapons to a near standstill. The conflict between nuclear weapons production and environment, health and safety rages at four key facilities:

Rocky Flats Plant

The U.S. has not produced new warhead triggers (also known as "pits") since plutonium operations were halted here in November 1989. Rocky Flats houses the only foundry where plutonium metal can be shaped into warhead components. But this building and others on site are currently shut down because safety problems pose risks to workers and the surrounding population. PSR is fighting the DOE's attempts to restart this plant to make warheads for the Trident II missile and other weapons systems.

Rocky Flats is also near its legal limit for storing hazardous waste on site. Without a plan to reduce the volume of toxic chemicals and radioactive equipment, operations that produce waste may not resume. In 1990, the DOE proposed a new $1 billion facility to separate plutonium from this waste for use in new warheads. PSR succeeded in stopping this warhead production plant, and is demanding a plan for closing and cleaning up Rocky Flats permanently.

Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP)

WIPP's burrowed salt caverns in New Mexico were the intended burial ground for the nuclear waste from Rocky Flats now being stored in several states. Without WIPP, waste currently accumulating at Rocky Flats could exceed allowable limits and prevent the plant from producing warheads. But WIPP has not passed key environmental and safety tests to assure that waste buried there would leave the soil and water uncontaminated. And transportation of waste to WIPP poses additional threats to communities along transport routes.

The DOE would like to exempt WIPP from key environmental laws by invoking "national security," by which it means the continued production of nuclear weapons. Just such exemptions caused the public health and environmental problems that currently plague the weapons complex. PSR believes the public's security is best served by making protection of citizens' health the top priority and by strictly enforcing environmental protection laws.

Hanford Reservation

The nine reactors used to produce plutonium at Hanford are shut down, but the DOE wants to restart the trouble-plagued Plutonium-Uranium Reprocessing plant (PUREX). The DOE says PUREX is needed to "clean-up" the N-reactor, closed in 1988, by dissolving old nuclear fuel rods. But the DOE really wants to recover weapons-grade plutonium for future warheads. Citizens groups note that PUREX restart would generate over a million gallons of new radioactive waste, and would cost more than other proposals to decommission the N-reactor.

Hanford already stores nearly half the nation's military wastes, which pose a contamination risk to the Columbia River and the surrounding region. Millions of gallons of this "witches brew" are stored in single-shell tanks which have a history of leaks and could explode. The exact contents of the tanks is unknown, and no long-term waste plan exists.

Savannah River Plant Reactors

All five of the crippled production reactors at Savannah River have been shut down since 1988. DOE wants to restart three reactors to produce tritium gas, used in nuclear warheads to boost their explosive power. But restart will require checking and either repairing or replacing the cooling and safety systems, some of which are 40 years old. Environmental, health and safety concerns were ignored at Savannah River while these reactors were run into the ground.

Tritium gas deteriorates and is replaced periodically in many U.S. warheads. The DOE claimed in 1988 that national security would be jeopardized if tritium production did not resume swiftly, but no crisis has resulted. The DOE has stretched its tritium supply, and planned arms reductions can further delay the need to resume production at these unsafe reactors. But the DOE still claims it needs two new reactors to produce tritium, one at Savannah River and one in Idaho. Costing over $10 billion, these plants would take 10 years to build and would produce three times the tritium needed to supply the current U.S. arsenal of 23,000 warheads.

(For more details on DOE facilities, see "Status Report," pp 4-5.) ◆

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If you wish to be placed on the PSR Legislative Alert Network to receive timely information on congressional action, please write or call:

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This *Monitor* was written and produced by Daryl Kimball, David Lewis and Sally James. We encourage readers to reprint the information in this *Monitor*, with proper credit to PSR.

Nationwide Public Hearings Begin on Future of Nuclear Weapons Complex

In June 1989, PSR and 21 other citizen groups filed a lawsuit demanding that DOE complete a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) on its nuclear weapons production complex. In January 1990, Energy Secretary Watkins responded with a plan to conduct two separate PEIS's. One will evaluate DOE plans for waste management and environmental restoration ("clean-up"). The other will evaluate DOE proposals for modernizing weapons production in the complex. Both will provide the public with opportunities to comment on the health and environmental consequences of the major changes being proposed for the complex.

What You Can Do:

- ❒ Present comments at the nationwide public hearings, or submit written comments.
- ❒ Contact Daryl Kimball at PSR/National for information on hearing dates, times, and places, and for sample oral or written comments. PSR can also introduce you to others in your area who are participating. Here is the tentative list of hearing sites — hearings are expected to begin in late 1990:

Albuquerque, NM	Columbus, OH	Portland, OR
Amarillo, TX	Denver, CO	Richland, WA
Atlanta, GA	Idaho Falls, ID	St. Louis, MO
Boise, ID	Long Island, NY	Seattle, WA
Buffalo, NY	Las Vegas, NV	Spokane, WA
Chicago, IL	Oak Ridge, TN	Tampa, FL
Cincinnati, OH	Oakland, CA	Trenton, NJ
Columbia, SC	Paducah, KY	Washington, DC

PEIS on the "Clean-up" of the Nuclear Weapons Facilities

The first PEIS will focus on proposals and alternatives for the containment of waste and the mitigation of the risks resulting from 50 years of nuclear weapons development, production, and testing. The DOE has only recently begun to bring dozens of active and inactive nuclear weapons plants and waste storage areas into compliance with environmental, safety, and health regulations and to reduce the health risks at these facilities. Efforts to contain the wastes will take decades and may cost more than $200 billion. The DOE's own five-year plan for clean-up underestimates the cost and breadth of the problem, and gives higher priority to managing waste from future nuclear weapons production.

PSR and other activists can participate in hearings on these issues, commenting on health risks, contamination problems, and clean-up options for specific sites. Citizens can also argue that no new waste should be generated by production and that clean-up of existing waste should get top priority. The first public hearings in the PEIS process are likely to begin in late 1990.

PEIS on the Modernization of Weapons Production

The second PEIS, likely to begin in early 1991, will assess the impact of DOE plans for nuclear weapons development, production, and testing into the next century. DOE's "Modernization Report," expected to be completed by January 1991, will propose new construction, repair, and relocation of production activities and will set a schedule for those actions.

At hearings, citizens can raise questions about the "need" to produce nuclear weapons, the public health risks and environmental hazards of further production, and the socio-economic impacts of closing or relocating large production facilities. Because assumptions about future nuclear arsenals directly influence DOE proposals, the "need" issue is fundamental to this study. The DOE should be compelled to consider the "need" for nuclear weapons in light of better East-West relations and likely arms reduction scenarios.

The PEIS Process

The upcoming PEIS's will be the first time the public and non-governmental scientific experts have been allowed to scrutinize formally the broad range of issues affecting the entire nuclear weapons complex. Previous EIS's on DOE activities have always been limited to individual sites or specific projects.

Each PEIS will go through three stages: public scoping hearings, completion of the draft PEIS and public comment hearings, and completion of the final PEIS. The whole process takes at least 18 months. PSR can help you participate; physicians and other concerned citizens can play an important role by speaking at the hearings and/or submitting written comments.

Activists can use the PEIS process, with its opportunities for media coverage and public education, to bring the issues of the future of nuclear weapons production and its effect on human health and the environment into the forefront of national public debate. ◆