

# NM watchdog group sues to halt plutonium factory

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A watchdog group filed suit Monday in federal court to halt a multibillion-dollar plutonium building planned at Los Alamos National Laboratory until an environmental study can be done.

The Los Alamos Study Group's lawsuit alleges the U.S. Department of Energy and the National Nuclear Security Administration violated the Environmental Protection Act by preparing to build the Chemical and Metallurgy Replacement Nuclear Facility without a new environmental impact statement.

The Study Group said CMRR's Nuclear Facility is meant only to increase the production capacity for the cores of nuclear weapons, known as pits. But it says NNSA has no pit production mission.

Los Alamos lab officials have said the facility would replace a 58-year-old lab where scientists analyze samples of plutonium and other radioactive materials and would be needed for other science, even if Los Alamos didn't do pit production.

Jennifer Wagner, an NNSA spokeswoman, said the agency doesn't comment on pending litigation.

She said NNSA is preparing a supplement analysis for the nuclear facility, a process that determines whether an existing environmental impact statement should be supplemented, a new environmental impact statement should be prepared or no new documents are required.

NNSA did an environmental statement in November 2003 for an earlier version of the project, but the Study Group contends the facility has substantially changed since then and would have greater environmental impact.

The lawsuit said a sitewide environmental impact statement that NNSA published in April 2008 did not describe or analyze the facility now proposed.

"The underground behemoth NNSA now proposes to build bears little resemblance to the light, above-ground structure proposed in 2003. Any supplemental analysis of the existing plan falls far short of what the law requires," Study Group director Greg Mello said.

The lawsuit also said the design was changed without notice or opportunity for public comment.

Mello said there's "a lot of political and bureaucratic momentum behind the

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project," but "we think the government needs a kind of timeout to reconsider this project in a more calm and objective way."

The project consists of two buildings. A radiological laboratory and office building is finished and is being equipped. The other structure, CMRR's Nuclear Facility, is expected to begin construction next year but would not be completed for a decade, the lawsuit said.

There's no exact cost figure for CMRR, but a 2008 Senate report estimated it at \$2.6 billion - more than five times the initial estimate. The cost will be calculated after a final design for the facility.

The Los Alamos Study Group contends the project would cost \$4 billion and that there are simpler, cheaper and less environmentally damaging alternatives.

[SOURCE](#) [1]

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