

U.S. GAO Questions for Review of the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) Interim Plutonium Strategy

The GAO has begun work on issues related to the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) interim strategy for managing the nation's plutonium, as directed by a congressional mandate in Senate Report 112-173. GAO plans to assess the following research objectives:

- 1) What effect could NNSA's alternative plutonium strategy have on NNSA's costs or risks to public health and safety?
- 2) What effect could this strategy have on the roles of other facilities and NNSA's ability to meet its plutonium mission?
- 3) What effect could this strategy have on the Los Alamos National Laboratory's (LANL) plutonium science mission and expertise?

Questions

1. Please provide your input on the CMRR-NF, particularly on NNSA's justification for building it and then on NNSA's justification for deferring it. To the extent possible, please provide specific input on NNSA's requirements for the CMRR-NF, its design plans, and the budget. For example, to what extent will the deferral of the CMRR-NF avoid costs over the next few years? What challenges exist, if any, for reconstituting the CMRR-NF in the future, if necessary? Can NNSA meet its mission without the CMRR-NF over the long-term? If not, why not? What are NNSA's needs regarding pit manufacturing vs. pit reuse?
2. To the extent possible, please provide your input on NNSA's plans to mitigate challenges associated with managing analytical chemistry operations without the CMRR-NF. For example, what other facilities might be used as in lieu of the CMRR-NF over the short term or over the long term? What will be the impacts on NNSA's ability to meet its mission and on resources if such plans were implemented?
3. What are the primary safety concerns for plutonium facilities at LANL? Specifically, regarding seismic concerns, what is known about the potential for structural failures at LANL and what are the risks to workers and the public from exposure in case of earthquake and/or earthquake-induced fire? From your viewpoint, has LANL adequately addressed safety concerns to keep the CMR operational until 2019 as is currently planned and to build the CMRR-NF at some point in the future? From your viewpoint, are there safety concerns with other plutonium facilities at LANL, such as PF-4 or RLUOB?
4. Please provide your input on budget impacts of NNSA's planning scenarios, particularly the relative costs of the CMRR-NF versus the interim strategies being discussed. Also, please address the proposed reprogramming under NNSA's interim plutonium strategy. What are the pros and cons of some of the integrated components, such as the planned tunnel, and whether a tunnel is consistent with the various interim strategies being considered. For example, if an underground phased, module facility is developed, will the tunnel be an integral part of the facility or an impediment?
5. Under NNSA's proposed interim plans, the CMRR-NF will be deferred for 5 years, then work on it will resume. What are the challenges, particularly in terms of time frames and costs, associated with resuming the design and construction of the CMRR-NF in 5 or more years?