

UPF UPDATE

MAY 2013

The Uranium Processing Facility is a \$7.5 billion bomb plant the National Nuclear Security Administration wants to build at the Y12 Nuclear Weapons Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. The mission of the UPF is to produce the thermonuclear secondary, for US nuclear bombs and warheads as part of the Life Extension Program.

RISING COSTS

The cost of the UPF is rising rapidly—in the FY 2014 budget request, NNSA says the cost of design alone will reach \$1.16 billion dollars. When the UPF was proposed in 2005, the total cost estimate was \$1.5 billion.

The FY 2014 budget projects some out-year spending. In 2016 costs cross the half billion dollar mark; by 2018 NNSA projects a UPF budget of \$616 million. One important number remains unknown—the total cost for the UPF is still “TBD” in the president’s budget.

Soaring costs are a hallmark of NNSA construction projects. The Government Accountability Office has repeatedly found NNSA’s cost accounting system deficient.

The NNSA said it built a contingency into its latest cost estimate (\$6.5 billion), but that contingency has been exhausted by the re-design of the UPF. The Army Corps of Engineers has estimated the total cost to be at least \$7.5 billion. Congress is requiring a Department of Defense study of the cost of the UPF.

FALLING NEED

The need for the UPF depends on accepting two propositions: 1] Life Extension of future warheads will require replacing entire secondaries; and 2] future stockpile needs will not change significantly.

Neither of these propositions is necessarily true. An independent study is necessary to confirm the need for secondary replacements—some information suggests secondaries might be re-used with replacement of a limited number of parts.

Congress is also taking a hard look at the proposed life extension of the B61. The cost for the B61 LEP has leaped from \$2 billion to over \$10 billion which has given some people pause. At the same time, pressure from Germany and other NATO countries to remove the B61 from Europe call into question whether this bomb will continue to have a mission. There is no need for a quick decision—the B61 LEP could be put off at least 10 years.

SECURITY QUESTION

The July 28, 2012 Transform Now Plowshares action, where three peace activists penetrated the ultra-high security zone at Y12 and defaced the walls of the Highly Enriched Uranium Materials Facility highlights a fundamental vulnerability of the proposed UPF—it is being built above ground in a narrow valley between unprotected ridges.

OREPA believes the Plowshares incursion demands a reconsideration of the above-ground design of the UPF.

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THE UPF

The UPF was proposed in 2005 as a replacement for aging production facilities, Building 9212, at Y12 in Oak Ridge.

The original plan for the UPF included modernized dismantlement operations; that mission was dropped in October 2012 when designers realized the facility was too small to hold all the equipment planned for it.

In 2014, the UPF gets a name change—the Uranium Capabilities Replacement Project—obfuscating the fact that the UPF is the flagship of the next generation of nuclear weapons production facilities in the US.

LIFE EXTENSION PROGRAM

The NNSA’s Life Extension Program seeks to refurbish and replace aging parts of weapons in the US nuclear stockpile to extend their useful life for 60-80 years.

In some cases, life extension modifications significantly change the military capabilities of the warhead being “LEPped,” effectively creating a new nuclear weapon.

In 2013, the US is performing LEPs on the W-76 Trident warhead; plans to perform LEPs on the B61 bomb are undergoing scrutiny; initial studies on LEPs for the W78/88 warhead are also beginning.