



NEWS

For Immediate Release
March 31, 2004

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202-586-7371

NNSA to Start Moving TA-18 Nuclear Materials

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) announced today it will begin moving special nuclear materials from Los Alamos National Laboratory Technical Area 18 (TA-18) to the Device Assembly Facility (DAF) at the Nevada Test Site in anticipation of shifting the TA-18 mission to DAF.

In September 2004, NNSA will start shipping the first 50 percent of the TA-18 programmatic special nuclear materials to Nevada. This campaign will last approximately 18 months. NNSA will immediately start preparing the DAF to support storage of these nuclear materials while scheduling packaging and transportation resources.

“Relocation of this special nuclear material is a major step in accelerating our efforts to move TA-18 operations to the Nevada Test Site,” said NNSA Administrator Linton F. Brooks. “Getting this material out of TA-18 and to Nevada will assist NNSA in more quickly establishing critical national security missions in Nevada while consolidating special nuclear materials in a newer, more secure facility.”

Since 2000, NNSA has explored options for terminating TA-18 operations, including a new underground facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory and other Department of Energy sites such as Argonne National Laboratory in Idaho and Sandia National Laboratories in New Mexico. NNSA has already strengthened security at TA-18 and has also removed more than one metric ton of special nuclear material no longer required.

The DAF was originally constructed in the late 1980s and early 1990s in support of underground testing; however, the halt of that mission has left the facility underutilized.

Brooks said NNSA is employing a balanced approach to relocating the TA-18 missions and capabilities to the DAF to address security, mission need, and taxpayer cost. DAF today is used to support the build up of subcritical experiments and also targets for the two stage-gas gun that operates at the test site. NNSA is designing modifications to DAF to assume TA-18 program responsibilities. Once modifications are complete, the remaining special nuclear material to support the associated missions will be moved.

The TA-18 facilities are the nation’s only facilities capable of performing general-purpose nuclear materials handling and criticality experiments. These experiments provide unique training to a variety of federal agencies, including DOE, NNSA, and Nuclear Regulatory Commission personnel in areas such as nuclear materials safety, emergency response in support of counterterrorism activities, and safeguards and arms control in support of programs aimed at controlling excess nuclear materials.

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NA-04-10