



# NEWS

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **Department of Energy Certifies Need to Build a Modern Pit Facility**

The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) today announced that it will begin conceptual design work for a facility to manufacture plutonium pits for nuclear weapon. Pit production was shut down in 1989 at the Rocky Flats plant, and no pits have been produced since then. The NNSA's plans call for the new facility to be on line by 2020.

The United States is the only nuclear power without the capability to manufacture a plutonium pit. A pit is a critical component of a nuclear weapon and functions as a trigger to allow a modern nuclear weapon to operate properly. The new facility will reestablish the capability to manufacture all pit types in the nation's current nuclear stockpile and meet any future requirements in an environmentally compliant manner.

The action supports a recommendation in the Bush Administration's Nuclear Posture Review (NPR). The NPR says that having the ability to produce pits is important to ensure the future viability of the Nation's nuclear deterrent. The lack of a pit production facility has also been identified as a critical defense readiness gap by Congress, the Department of Defense and outside experts, including the Chiles Commission and the Foster Panel.

NNSA Administrator John Gordon determined that NNSA's mission required construction of a modern pit facility and Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham approved a decision document to allow the planning to begin.

"The Department supports the nuclear weapons needs established by the Department of Defense," said Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham. "We need to have the capacity to manufacture certified pits to maintain the safety, security and reliability of the U.S. nuclear deterrent into the future."

While conceptual design work will begin immediately, the NNSA will start the site evaluation and selection process required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in September 2002. Any Department of Energy site that will be considered for this facility will need to meet the Department's criteria for experience with nuclear materials and be in a remote location.

Depending on the production capacity of the facility, the project is expected to cost between \$2.2 and 4.1 billion.

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The decision to proceed with the design and planning for a modern pit facility is the latest development in NNSA's pit program.

The NNSA's interim pit production and certification facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory has met all pit production and certification milestones and is on-track to manufacture a certifiable W88 pit in FY 2003. Although that facility cannot support long-term stockpile needs, it will allow NNSA to meet its current manufacturing requirements and provide valuable information for the design of the new pit facility.

**-NNSA-**

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