

Fire Closes in on Plutonium at Los Alamos National Laboratory

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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Region: [USA](#)

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As I [noted](#) Tuesday, raging wildfires are threatening the Los Alamos National Laboratory.

As Reuters [reported](#) the same day:

The fire ... surrounds the lab complex and adjacent town of Los Alamos on three sides.

Today, Associated Press [provides](#) details on the size of the fire:

A wildfire that is threatening the nation's premier nuclear weapons laboratory ... is poised to become the largest fire in state history.

The fire near Los Alamos has charred nearly 145 square miles, or 92,735 acres.

They're bracing for winds that could gust up to 40 mph Thursday afternoon.

ABC [quotes](#) the lab's former top security official to give some perspective on the danger:

"It contains approximately 20,000 barrels of nuclear waste," former top [Los Alamos National Lab] security official Glen Walp said. "It's not contained within a concrete, brick and mortar-type building, but rather in a sort of fabric-type building that a fire could easily consume.

"Potential is high for a major calamity if the fire would reach these areas," he added.

Yahoo News [notes](#) that the fire is getting close to the drums of plutonium:

[T]he plant is reportedly home to 30,000 55-gallon drums of plutonium-contaminated waste. As of Thursday morning, the flames were reportedly two miles away from this waste. "The concern is that these drums will get so hot that they'll burst," says Joni Arends, executive director of the Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, as quoted by the San Francisco Chronicle. There is also concern that the fire could stir up nuclear-contaminated soil left over from years of testing, sending the nuclear waste into the plumes of smoke hovering

over the area.

ABC [reports](#) today:

Along with what's actually on lab property, there is concern about what's in the canyons that surround the sprawling complex. Nuclear tests were performed in the canyons dating back to the 1940s; so-called "legacy contaminations."

"The trees have grown up during that timeframe, and the soil can also be contaminated. If they get heated and that stuff goes air borne, then we are concerned," Rita Bates of the New Mexico Environment Department said.

As Los Alamos lab expert Peter Stockton [told](#) Time:

[We just have to] hope to hell that the wind blows in the right direction.

To add insult to injury, [lightning is forecast](#) for the Los Alamos area.

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