

Fire Threatens Plutonium and Uranium Release at Los Alamos National Laboratory

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Environment](#)

A raging wildfire is threatening to engulf the Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Los Alamos has likely tested more nuclear weapons than any other facility in the world.

As if that weren't bad enough, AP [notes](#):

The anti-nuclear watchdog group Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, however, said the fire appeared to be about 3 1/2 miles from a dumpsite where as many as 30,000 55-gallon drums of plutonium-contaminated waste were stored in fabric tents above ground. The group said the drums were awaiting transport to a low-level radiation dump site in southern New Mexico.

Lab spokesman Steve Sandoval declined to confirm that there were any such drums currently on the property.

Later, Los Alamos [confirmed](#) the allegation:

Lab officials at first declined to confirm that such drums were on the property, but in a statement early Tuesday, lab spokeswoman Lisa Rosendorf said such drums are stored in a section of the complex known as Area G. She said the drums contain cleanup from Cold War-era waste that the lab sends away in weekly shipments to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant.

She said the drums were on a paved area with few trees nearby and would be safe even if a fire reached the storage area. Officials have said it is miles from the flames.

The Los Alamos Study Group [alleges](#) that the waste is not all from the Cold War, because the facility is cranking out more nuclear weapons than ever.

The lab has called in a special team to [test plutonium and uranium levels](#) in the air as a "precaution".

One area within the Los Alamos complex already suffered a temporary fire, which was doused. As Reuters [reports](#):

A small offshoot of the blaze jumped State Highway 4 onto the lab grounds on Monday, burning about an acre (0.4 hectare) of property before it was extinguished about two hours later.

The Wall Street Journal [notes](#) that the surrounding canyons also contain radioactivity from past bomb tests:

Authorities also are worried about potential radiation releases from nearby canyons. Radioactive material from nuclear tests was deposited in the canyons decades ago, and if trees in those canyons go up in flames, they could release radiation into the air, said Rita Bates, an air-quality official with the New Mexico Environment Department. That could raise the “potential for that smoke to affect people’s health,” she added.

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