



Peer Review and Design Competition in the NNSA National Security Laboratories

Committee on Peer Review and Design Competition Related to Nuclear Weapons, Laboratory Assessments Board, Division on Engineering and Physical Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine National Academies of Sciences

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The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) is responsible for providing and maintaining the capabilities necessary to sustain a safe, secure, and reliable nuclear weapons stockpile for the nation and its allies. Major responsibility for meeting the NNSA missions falls to the three NNSA laboratories: Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL), and Sandia National Laboratories (SNL). The NNSA National Security Laboratories contribute to that goal by maintaining the skills and capabilities necessary for stewardship of a reliable nuclear stockpile and also by maintaining a high level of technical credibility, which is a component of the nuclear deterrent.

Since 1992 it has been U.S. policy not to conduct explosion tests of nuclear weapons. The resulting technical challenges have been substantial. Whereas a nuclear test was in some sense the ultimate "peer review" of the performance of a particular NEP design, the cessation of nuclear testing necessitated a much greater reliance on both intralab and interlab expert peer review to identify potential problems with weapon designs and define the solution space. This report assesses the quality and effectiveness of peer review of designs, development plans, engineering and scientific activities, and priorities related to both nuclear and non-nuclear aspects of nuclear weapons, as well as incentives for effective peer review. It also explores how the evolving mission of the NNSA laboratories might impact peer review processes at the laboratories that relate to nuclear weapons.

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