

The Chart Page

By Tamar A. Mehuron, Associate Editor

The Shrinking US Nuclear Weapons Complex

From 1945 through 1991, the mission of the US nuclear weapons complex was to design, test, and build weapons of awesome power, safety, and reliability. Three national laboratories designed some 95 types of systems. The Nevada Test Site conducted roughly 900 tests to assure reliability. The active stockpile in 1990 contained approximately 21,000 weapons of 25 types, all of which had to be handled with utmost care and attention to detail. The job of managing this enterprise supported a 55,000-person contractor workforce.

This all changed in 1991, however. The collapse of the Soviet Union, along with superpower arms agreements, and unilateral US withdrawal of Army nuclear weapons from overseas bases fundamentally changed the Department of Energy nuclear weapons complex. In 1992 came a moratorium on US nuclear testing. The mission changed from producing, deploying, and testing weapons to prolonging the existing stockpile through "scientific study, simulation, and refurbishment."

The table shows the percentage changes in management and operating contractor employment from 1988 to 2000 at each DoE facility. Facilities that were shuttered and closed included Rocky Flats in Colorado, Pinellas in Florida, and Mound in Ohio. Employment plummeted to 24,500.

A Dozen Years of Downsizing

Nuclear Weapons Complex Site	Number Employed				Percent Change 1988–2000
	FY 1988	FY 1992	FY 1995	FY 2000	
Rocky Flats Plant, Colo.	4,990	5,332	935	0	-100
Pinellas, Fla.	1,565	1,386	511	0	-100
Mound, Ohio	1,754	1,305	679	0	-100
Oak Ridge/Y-12 Plant, Tenn.	5,615	5,384	4,767	3,612	-36
Savannah River, S.C.	16,616	14,796	7,618	1,714	-90
Pantex Plant, Tex.	2,462	2,529	3,007	2,706	+10
Kansas City Plant, Mo.	5,760	3,941	2,984	2,499	-57
Nevada Test Site, Nev.	4,609	4,216	2,406	1,670	-64
Lawrence Livermore Natl. Lab, Calif.	3,841	3,609	3,251	3,934	+2
Los Alamos Natl. Lab, N.M.	3,173	3,194	3,143	4,746	+50
Sandia Natl. Lab, N.M.	4,278	4,548	4,168	3,620	-15
Other	167	1,598	359	2	-99
Total	54,830	51,838	33,828	24,503	-55

Employment figures are for management and operating contractors.

Source: GAO, "Nuclear Weapons: Improved Management Needed to Implement Stockpile Stewardship Program Effectively," December 2000.