



## Sandia National Laboratories/New Mexico Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is a Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement (SWEIS)?

An environmental impact statement (EIS) describes potential effects on the human environment that would occur as a result of a proposed federal action. A SWEIS assesses and describes the potential outcomes of a specific facility's operations and proposed activities that may have potential impacts on the environment over a period of 10 to 15 years.

### 2. What is the purpose of preparing a SWEIS for Sandia National Laboratories/New Mexico (SNL/NM)?

Preparing a SWEIS will allow the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), a semi-autonomous agency within the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), to make a decision about the nature and extent of future work to be conducted at SNL/NM, and to ensure that it can be done safely and within environmental, health, and safety regulatory limits and guidelines. That decision is made by studying the proposed alternatives and their potential impacts. The SWEIS will also help improve and coordinate NNSA plans, functions, programs, and resource utilization at SNL/NM. If other alternatives are developed during the scoping process, they will also be analyzed in the SWEIS. For the SWEIS, NNSA anticipates that the action alternatives will include a Modernization Alternative and an Expanded Operations Alternative.

### 3. Who is preparing the SWEIS for SNL/NM?

The SWEIS is being prepared by NNSA's Sandia Field Office (SFO) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)<sup>1</sup> implementing regulations, Council on Environmental Quality NEPA regulations, and DOE NEPA implementing procedures. These require the federal government to evaluate the potential effects of its activities on the environment and to consider alternative courses of action. NNSA is using an independent contractor to analyze data concerning the impacts of SNL/NM operations.

### 4. Do other similar facilities go through this process?

Yes. NNSA has prepared site-wide NEPA documents at various sites—Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Los Alamos National Laboratory, the Nevada National Security Site, and elsewhere. All federal agencies must comply with NEPA.

### 5. What will be considered in the SWEIS?

In its evaluation of current and foreseeable operations and activities at SNL/NM, NNSA proposes to consider the following alternatives:

(1) No Action Alternative—Includes current SNL/NM operations and activities for which separate NEPA reviews are already underway or were recently completed.

(2) Modernized Operations—Continued support of existing programs and activities by modernizing facilities, as necessary. Includes the scope of the No Action Alternative, plus modernization

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<sup>1</sup> Congress enacted the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (Pub. L. 91-190, 42 U.S.C. 4321-4347, with subsequent amendments) in 1969 in part to promote efforts that will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment, and improve our understanding of the ecological systems and natural resources important to the Nation.

activities. Includes (1) construction of replacement facilities, (2) upgrades to existing facilities and infrastructure, and (3) decontamination, decommissioning, and demolition projects.

(3) Expanded Operations—Includes the scope of the Modernized Operations Alternative plus actions that would expand operations and missions to respond to future national security challenges and meet increasing requirements. Includes (1) construction and operation of new facilities and (2) significant upgrades to existing facilities. This alternative would expand capabilities at SNL/NM beyond those that currently exist.

6. What is a scoping process? And what input are you soliciting for the SWEIS?

The scoping process is an opportunity for all interested parties, including agencies (federal, state, and local), public interest groups, tribes/pueblos, local businesses, industry, organizations, and members of the public, to provide input on the scope of alternatives and environmental resource areas that are proposed to be analyzed in the SWEIS. If any reasonable alternatives are developed during this process, they will be analyzed in the SWEIS along with the No Action and other alternatives.

The SWEIS project team will present an overview of the SWEIS and its approximate timelines. All stakeholders are encouraged to participate, either by commenting during the in-person scoping meeting on May 9, 2023, or the online virtual scoping meeting on May 11, 2023, or by submitting comments or questions by mail or email as instructed on the NNSA SWEIS website at <https://www.sandia.gov/about/environment/sweis>.

All comments will be noted and addressed in the Draft SWEIS, which is scheduled to be publicly available in 2025.

7. What about future work not covered by the SWEIS?

Work not covered by the SWEIS will require separate environmental review under NEPA. Public notification and participation will be conducted in accordance with the DOE NEPA requirements.

8. Will classified projects be included in the SWEIS?

Yes. The SWEIS evaluates the environmental impacts of all SNL/NM operations. NNSA will review classified projects during the preparation of the SWEIS, and the public will be provided unclassified information on the environmental or public health impacts associated with them. Any classified materials essential to the preparation of the SWEIS will be retained in classified reference documents, available only to authorized reviewers.

9. Will the public have an opportunity to read and comment on the Draft SWEIS?

Yes. The NEPA process encourages all interested parties, including agencies (federal, state, and local), public interest groups, tribes/pueblos, local businesses, industry, organizations, and members of the public, to participate in the environmental review process. The SWEIS process began with the publication of a Notice of Intent in the *Federal Register* in April 2023. This is followed by a 45-day public comment period and two public scoping meetings (one in person and one virtual). Another public comment period and public hearings will be scheduled following the issuance of Notice of Availability of the Draft SWEIS. A final SWEIS will also include a minimum 30-day waiting period before NNSA issuance of a Record of Decision (ROD).

10. Has a similar environmental review ever been conducted at SNL/NM?

Yes. SNL/NM currently operates under a SWEIS issued in 1999, *Final Site-Wide EIS for Sandia National Laboratories, New Mexico* (1999 SWEIS; DOE/EIS-0281), its four supplement analyses (SAs) (DOE/EIS-0281-SA-01, 2001; DOE/EIS-0281-SA-02, 2002; DOE/EIS-0281-SA-03, 2004; and DOE/EIS-0281-SA-04, 2006), and other project-specific NEPA documents.

The 1999 SWEIS examined existing and potential impacts to the environment from ongoing and anticipated future NNSA operations conducted over approximately a 10-year period for SNL/NM operations.

An SA is a document prepared pursuant to DOE NEPA regulations (10 CFR 1021.314(c)) to determine whether a supplemental or new EIS should be prepared, or whether no further NEPA documentation is required. Three of the four SNL/NM SAs based on the 1999 SWEIS dealt with implementing new or changed operations and replacing facilities; the fourth SA (DOE/EIS-028-SA-04, August 2006) assessed whether potential environmental impacts from site operations remained within those projected in the 1999 SWEIS for the level of operations selected in the ROD. Based on these SAs, NNSA determined that a new SWEIS was not necessary at that time.

11. Why is a SWEIS being prepared now?

Given the length of time since issuance of the 1999 SWEIS and its associated ROD (64 FR 69996; December 15, 1999), new information, and the evolution of mission needs, NNSA determined that preparation of a new SWEIS was appropriate. On June 24, 2011, NNSA issued an NOI to prepare a new SWEIS for SNL/NM (76 FR 37100). NNSA's completion of that SWEIS, however, was delayed by competing program and resource priorities. Since the NOI was issued in 2011, mission needs have continued to evolve and further information has become available. Consequently, NNSA has now determined that preparation of a new SWEIS with a fresh scoping process would best serve the purposes of NEPA by providing NNSA and the public with the most current environmental and programmatic information.

12. Will the SWEIS evaluate environmental justice issues as required by federal regulations?

Yes. Environmental justice will be evaluated in the SWEIS. The SWEIS will identify low-income, minority, and tribes/pueblos within a 50-mile radius of the SNL/NM site, including the Pueblo of Isleta.

13. Will the SWEIS assess the risks of potential security or terrorist threats to SNL/NM?

Yes. SNL/NM continually assesses security issues and provides appropriate security measures as needed to protect its facilities, personnel, and the public. The SWEIS, a public document, cannot discuss security measures that could reveal threat vulnerabilities. However, results of the impacts analysis for what are termed Intentional Destructive Acts will be made unclassified to the extent practicable.

14. Will the SWEIS address accident scenarios in and around the SNL/NM site?

Yes. A variety of accident scenarios will be analyzed and included in the SWEIS.