

## DOGE : 1 / SÉCURITÉ NATIONALE : 0

17 mars 2025

Comment peut-on s'y prendre pour dégrader considérablement la sécurité d'un système à haut risque ?

- dégrader fortement les structures en charge de la maîtrise des risques ;
- casser profondément le moral, la cohésion du système humain.

La commission nationale d'enquête sur l'accident nucléaire de Three Mile Island l'avait souligné : 80% des problèmes ayant contribué à l'accident étaient de nature organisationnelle et humaine.

Si l'on veut être certain d'atteindre des niveaux stratosphériques en matière de dommage à la sécurité nationale, et à la sécurité du pays – sans avoir besoin d'une attaque russe ou chinoise – on peut appliquer avec entrain et exubérance ces anti-recettes au système en charge... des armes nucléaires.

Ça marche même avec des impulsions qui ne sont pas encore radicales en termes de volume. Dans ces systèmes, la qualité, la confiance, la rigueur, le travail sur le long terme et la cohérence sont des facteurs décisifs.

Quand on n'a pas lu une ligne en matière de sécurité des systèmes, que l'on n'a rien étudié dans le domaine, que l'on traite le nucléaire militaire comme s'il s'agissait d'une vulgaire usine Tesla, au moins, on peut y aller avec un entrain sans borne.

Certes, on pourra tenter à tel ou tel moment de faire marche arrière mais, si démolir est simple et peut être expéditif, il faut des années pour reconstruire la sécurité en profondeur d'un système à haut risque.

Entre temps, les avertissements de Scott D. Sagan pourraient avoir quelque retentissement... Et si d'aventure une arme devait connaître une "excursion accidentelle", il vaudrait mieux ne pas tout de suite prétendre que c'est une attaque extérieure devant conduire à tout et n'importe quoi en termes de réplique...

Tous les grands auteurs et acteurs de la fiabilité des systèmes doivent être mortifiés.



<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/17/us/politics/federal-job-cuts-nuclear-bomb-engineers-scientists.html>

## **DOGE Cuts Reach Key Nuclear Scientists, Bomb Engineers and Safety Experts**

Firings and buyouts hit the top-secret National Nuclear Security Administration amid a major effort to upgrade America's nuclear arsenal. Critics say it shows the consequences of heedlessly cutting the federal work force.

March 17, 2025 Updated 8:49 a.m. ET



Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. The National Nuclear Security Administration field office that oversees the lab lost nine staff members, according to documents reviewed by The New York Times. The Albuquerque Journal, via Associated Press

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They handled the secure transport of nuclear materials — dangerous, demanding work that requires rigorous training. Four of them took the Trump administration's offer of a buyout and left the National Nuclear Security Administration.

A half-dozen staff members left a unit in the agency that builds reactors for nuclear submarines.

And a biochemist and engineer who had recently joined the agency as head of the team that enforces safety and environmental standards at a Texas plant that assembles nuclear warheads was fired.

In the past six weeks, the agency, just one relatively small outpost in a federal work force that President Trump and his top adviser Elon Musk aim to drastically pare down, has lost a huge cadre of scientists, engineers, safety experts, project officers, accountants and lawyers — all in the midst of its most ambitious endeavors in a generation.

The nuclear agency, chronically understaffed but critically important, is the busiest it has been since the Cold War. It not only manages the nation's 3,748 nuclear bombs and warheads, it is modernizing that arsenal — a \$20-billion-a-year effort that will arm a new fleet of nuclear submarines, bomber jets and land-based missiles.

Since the last year of the first Trump administration, the agency has been desperately trying to build up its staff to handle the added workload. Though it was still hundreds of employees short of what it had said it needed, it had edged up to about 2,000 workers by January.

Now, with the Trump administration's buyouts and firings, the agency's trajectory has gone from one of painstaking growth to retraction.

More than 130 employees took the government's offer of a payout to resign, according to internal agency documents obtained by The New York Times that have not previously been reported. Those departures, together with those of about 27 workers who were caught up in a mass firing and not rehired, wiped out most of the recent staffing gains.

Engaged in top-secret work, tucked away in the Energy Department, the agency typically stays below the public radar. But it has emerged as a headline example of how the Trump administration's cuts, touted as a cure-all for supposed government extravagance and corruption, are threatening the muscle and bone of operations that involve national security or other missions at the very heart of the federal government's responsibilities.



Workers at the Los Alamos nuclear site preparing to clean up a demolished building in 2009. Mark Holm for The New York Times

The exodus “is going to make the job more difficult because what you lost were some of your most valuable leaders,” said Scott Roecker, the vice president of the nuclear materials security program at the Nuclear Threat Initiative, a nonprofit organization. “These were very accomplished, very successful, very well-trained people who were performing complex, niche jobs.”

Among the departures: At least 27 engineers, 13 program or project analysts, 12 program or project managers, six budget analysts or accountants, five physicists or scientists, as well as attorneys, compliance officers and technologists, according to internal lists.

The agency lost not only officials deeply steeped in the weapons modernization program, but also a noted arms control expert at a time when President Trump has said he hopes to restart talks with Russia and China about limiting nuclear arsenals.

“Here we are building new nuclear weapons, and they’re building nuclear weapons,” [Mr. Trump said in the Oval Office last month](#). “We’re all spending a lot of money that we could be spending on other things.”

Ben Dietderich, the Department of Energy’s chief spokesman said, “Contrary to news reports, the Energy Department’s nuclear weapons production plants and nuclear laboratories are operated by federal contractors and have been exempt” from cuts.

But multiple current and former officials of the agency said the loss of staff would hobble the agency’s ability to monitor the more than 60,000 contract employees who carry out much of the agency’s work. That could encourage fraud or misuse of taxpayer dollars, rather than limit it, as Mr. Trump and Mr. Musk have vowed the new Department of Government Efficiency initiative will do.

“The federal oversight is vital,” said Corey Hinderstein, the agency’s deputy administrator for nonproliferation under President Joseph R. Biden Jr. “Do you have any construction projects at your house? You wouldn’t just say to the contractor: ‘I want something like this room. Have fun.’”

Andrea Woods, a spokeswoman for the Energy Department said in a statement, “N.N.S.A is committed to continuing its critical national security mission through the development, modernization and stewardship of America’s nuclear deterrent and nonproliferation and counterterrorism efforts.”

The department has said that most of the fired employees handled administrative and clerical tasks that were not critical to the agency’s operation. But an analysis of the internal documents by The Times, coupled with interviews with 18 current and former agency officials, shows that is not true for the bulk of people who took the buyout.

Many who left held a top-secret security clearance, called Q, that gave them access to information about how nuclear weapons are designed, produced and used, officials said. The offer allowed them to go on administrative leave with pay through September, then resign.

### **An Exodus of ‘Star Performers’**

Artifacts from nuclear facilities on display at the Atomic Museum in Las Vegas.Cody Cobb for The New York Times

Governmentwide, a disproportionate number of the roughly 75,000 federal workers who have taken the buyouts so far are those whose skills are in demand in the private sector and will be hard to replace, according to Max Stier, the president and chief executive of Partnership for Public Service, a nonprofit organization that studies governance.

Ernest J. Moniz, who served as energy secretary under President Barack Obama, said, “It’s going to be the star performers who have the best opportunity to leave and go to the private sector.”

The agency’s office of defense programs, which is in charge of the modernization effort, lost Ian Dinesen, its chief of staff. He took the buyout. So did Charles P. Kosak, a senior adviser who had served as deputy assistant secretary at both the Defense and Energy Departments.

Kyle Fowler, director of the program to enrich uranium, which is used in nuclear warheads and reactors on naval submarines, took a job with NATO. Also gone is Linda Cordero, a director with the program to modernize production of spheres of radioactive plutonium, called pits, that are fitted into warheads.

The field office that oversees the agency’s laboratory in Los Alamos, N.M., where plutonium pits are made, lost nine staff members, according to the documents reviewed by The Times. Budgeted for 97 employees in the fiscal year ending last September, it is now operating with 76. Among those who left was the deputy facility operations manager, a top job.

Terry C. Wallace Jr., who ran the laboratory in 2018, said that it carried out some of the agency’s most high-risk operations. The government is ultimately responsible both for ensuring the public’s safety and for authorizing work to proceed, he said. He is “quite certain” that fewer government staff members “will have a negative impact on the operation,” he added.

Y-12, a plant in Oak Ridge, Tenn., where the uranium for the next generation of nuclear weapons will be processed, is undergoing a huge overhaul that is already \$4 billion over budget. That field office lost four employees, and now operates with 84 of the 92 staff members it was budgeted for.

The Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tenn., lost half a dozen employees.Lynsey Weatherspoon for The New York Times

Another five staff members left the agency field office in Las Vegas that oversees a site nearly as large as Rhode Island where scientists conduct nuclear experiments that help determine the safety and viability of what’s in the nuclear stockpile, among other matters. One held the senior role of facility representative for 14 years, according to his LinkedIn profile. Budgeted for 82 staff members, the field office now has 67.

“Those are such hard jobs to fill, because people could make as much or more money working for the plant or laboratory itself,” said Jill Hruby, who led the National Nuclear Security Administration during the Biden administration.

### **Hurried Firings**

Agency officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of job repercussions, say even if they could find the right people for the vacancies, they don’t expect to be allowed to hire them.

And more cuts could be coming. Government agencies were ordered to come up with a plan for further reductions in force and submit it to the Office of Personnel Management by last Thursday.

Some of the agency’s workers who left were on the verge of retirement anyway. But because the offer to leave came so suddenly, several former officials said, those employees did not get the chance to properly prepare their replacements. Even a junior employee at the agency can take a year to train, officials said.

“Who’s going to teach those new people?” said one senior official who took the buyout and spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of jeopardizing the departure agreement. “Who’s going to mentor them, and who’s going to bring them up to speed?”

The situation could have been worse.

In mid-February, more than 300 probationary employees at the agency were informed that they would be fired — about one-seventh of the staff. After members of Congress complained to Chris Wright, the new energy secretary, all but about 27 of [those firings were rescinded](#).

Among those who protested were Senator Deb Fischer, Republican of Nebraska, and Senator Angus King, Independent of Maine, according to Trump administration officials. Both serve on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Mr. King, who discussed the firings with Mr. Wright repeatedly, said he questioned how much Mr. Wright was even involved in the firing decision. Mr. Wright has said he moved too quickly in authorizing the firings.

“This whole process of trying to downsize the government is being handled in the sloppiest, most irresponsible kind of way that one could imagine,” Mr. King said.

Members of Congress repeatedly complained to Chris Wright, the energy secretary, about the firings of probationary employees. Kaylee Greenlee/Reuters

Officials had initially expected that the nuclear agency’s national security mission would protect it from layoffs. More than 100,000 federal employees have been fired or accepted buyouts so far, but a majority of cuts have been at agencies that are not directly tied to national security.

The nuclear agency has struggled for years with understaffing, [according to the Government Accountability Office](#), a federal watchdog agency. In [a 2022 report](#), the nuclear agency said it faced “tremendous work-force attraction and retention problems.” One problem is that the agency is competing with the private sector over workers, including the agency’s own contractors. Another is finding people for such highly specialized work.

Officials were so worried about the loss of employees who transport nuclear materials that they denied the buyout to more than half of workers who signed up for it, according to agency documents.

“We were already understaffed there,” said Ms. Hinderstein, the agency’s former deputy. “Because how do you get people with extremely advanced security skills to be able to defend a nuclear weapon on the road and are willing to be long-haul truckers?”

A sailor aboard the U.S.S. Hampton, a nuclear-powered submarine. Kenny Holston/The New York Times

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**Did you work at the National Nuclear Security Administration? We'd like to hear from you.**

The Times would like to hear about your experience as we look into firings and buyouts at the agency and the impact they have had. We may reach out about your submission, but we will not publish any part of your response without contacting you first.

Brad Plumer contributed reporting from Washington. Kitty Bennett contributed research.

*A correction was made on*

*March 17, 2025*

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*An earlier version of this article misstated the name of the government agency responsible for regulating nuclear safety. It is the National Nuclear Security Administration, not the National Nuclear Safety Administration. The error was repeated in a picture caption.*