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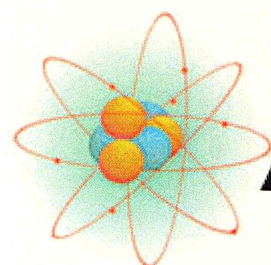
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Frank Munger's **Atomic City Underground**

Warhead waltz -- slow dance at Y-12

Production of replacement parts for W76 warheads remains on hold at Y-12 because of unresolved technical issues, according to a statement released today by federal

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staff there.

"Y-12 is continuing to work on the problem," said Steven Wyatt, a spokesman for the National Nuclear Security Administration.

The life-extension program (LEP) is at least several months behind schedule.

According to a June 2006 Inspector General report, the first refurbished W76 warhead was to be completed by Sept. 30, 2007. That was in jeopardy, the IG said at the time, because of test delays and other issues at the six government plants working on the project. Y-12 was cited for at least one of the problems.

Ted Sherry, the NNSA's chief in Oak Ridge, last month indicated that Y-12 was still grappling with the technical issues on the W76, and said a decision would be made in early 2008 on whether to proceed or how to proceed.

"We have done a lot of up-front work and work on trying to certify that (manufacturing) process, but we have not produced the first production unit," Sherry said.

Wyatt today said no decision has been made, and he refused to discuss the technical problems in any detail.

"As stated before, the delay in the W76 life-extension program is related to technical issues," he said. "This LEP is necessary to provide the nation with an adequate sea-based nuclear strategic deterrent consistent with national security."

The latter quote sounded like a cut-and-paste the U.S. Weapons Manual.

The W76 warheads are deployed on Trident submarine-launched ballistic missiles. Y-12 specializes in so-called secondaries -- the second stage of nuclear warheads.

Periodically, Y-12 and other plants in the nuclear weapons complex manufacture new parts to extend the lifetime of old warhead systems in the U.S. arsenal.

Posted by Frank Munger on January 24, 2008 at [05:55 PM](#)

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I don't know if this is relevant but as part of the W76 LEP a new processing plant for a non-nuclear special material was built at Y-12. The material is not specified.

Posted by: [John Ainslie](#) at [January 25, 2008 04:38 AM](#)

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