

## Los Alamos National Lab Director to Quit

*A scientific establishment is not a branch of the Armed Forces so it is nice to see a vice-admiral take his lumps.*

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The director of the Los Alamos nuclear weapons lab announced his departure Friday after two tumultuous years during which he made enemies with his hard-nosed efforts to stop financial abuses and security lapses.

Pete Nanos will be replaced May 16 by an interim director who will oversee the lab until the University of California's management contract with the government expires in September.

Nanos did not specify why he was leaving. His tenure was the shortest since the lab was created during World War II to build the atomic bomb.

"While there have been many challenges, I believe there have been many more successes, not so much because of what I may have done, but because of the men and women who care so much about this great institution," he said in a statement.

Nanos' boss, University of California President Robert C. Dynes, said that Nanos did a "remarkable job under extraordinary pressures and circumstances" and that Los Alamos was a "stronger, safer and better-managed laboratory today."

Some lab workers celebrated news of Nanos' departure at a restaurant.

"Every table is packed, and the beer is flowing," said Todd Kauppila, who was fired for his role in the case of two classified computer disks that were mistakenly thought to be missing — an incident that infuriated some lab employees.

Nanos, a former Navy vice admiral, had inherited a host of problems at Los Alamos, including credit card fraud and equipment theft. He took office vowing to "drain the swamp" and restore public confidence.

Nanos replaced top managers, instituted new purchasing rules and took inventory of lab property — moves that garnered high marks from the state's congressional delegation and Gov. Bill Richardson, who is a former energy secretary.

Last summer, when the two classified disks supposedly vanished, Nanos shut down all classified work and blamed "cowboys" who disobeyed rules on the handling of sensitive material.

"I don't care how many people I have to fire to make it stop," he said at the time. "If you think the rules are silly, if you think compliance is a joke, please resign now and save me the trouble."

It was finally determined that the disks were not missing at all; there was an inventory error. The Energy Department said the seven-month work suspension cost up to \$367 million. Lab officials put the loss figure much lower.

The shutdown intensified criticism of Nanos, and some scientists posted complaints to a Web blog.

Lab critic Peter Stockton of the Project on Government Oversight in Washington said that from a safety standpoint, Los Alamos under Nanos was "a mess." "He didn't listen to his own people even though he claimed he had an open door," Stockton said Friday.

The new interim director, Robert Kuckuck, has been with Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California for 35 years. He said he will initiate an open-door policy with lab employees.

"I'm coming in at a time of stress for these folks," he said. "They are operating under a microscope down there."

The university has not decided whether to bid to keep operating the lab. Among other potential bidders are Lockheed Martin Corp., which runs Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque, and defense contractor Northrop Grumman.