



Written by [D. Michael DeRidder](#) on October 7, 2024

U.S. Completes First Nuclear Warhead Plutonium Pit in 35 Years

U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) announced the completion of the First Production Unit (FPU) of a plutonium pit for the W87 Mod 1 thermonuclear missile warhead. The FPU's successful completion is the first time plutonium pits have been manufactured since production ceased in 1989.

The W87 Mod 1 warhead was selected to replace W78 warheads designed in the 1970s and deployed on Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) systems. The W87 Mod 1 warheads will be [deployed on the LGM-35A Sentinel](#) ICBMs, known as the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD), and are expected to enter service with the U.S. Air Force [sometime after 2030](#).



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The NNSA [stated in a press release](#) that they are rebuilding their plutonium pit manufacturing capabilities:

NNSA is currently rebuilding the capability to manufacture plutonium pits, at the rate of no fewer than 80 pits per year. During the Cold War, the United States could manufacture hundreds of pits per year. Pit production ceased in 1989, and NNSA continues to recapitalize production capabilities that atrophied in the post-Cold War era across the Nuclear Security Enterprise.

The press release also stated the FPU was “diamond stamped” for deployment to the U.S. nuclear stockpile by experts from multiple National Laboratories, and other agencies working with the NNSA:

This first fully qualified plutonium pit for the W87-1 nuclear warhead was “diamond stamped” after meeting all requirements, signifying its readiness for deployment to the U.S. nuclear stockpile at “war reserve” quality.



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