

## DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

August 17, 2001

**MEMORANDUM FOR:** J. Kent Fortenberry, Technical Director  
**FROM:** C. H. Keilers, Jr.  
**SUBJECT:** Los Alamos Report for Week Ending August 17, 2001

Staff members Jordan and McConnell were on site this week to help establish the site rep office.

**Plutonium Handling and Processing Facility (TA-55):** Early Monday morning, an off-site voltage fluctuation caused a complete loss of electrical power in TA-55. Essential lighting and instrumentation loads, including stack monitors, were immediately picked up by an uninterruptible power supply. Within 4 minutes, power to ventilation was restored by operator action. By design, this is not an automatic function in TA-55. During this period, normally occupied spaces were susceptible to possible air-flow reversal. Within about 3 hours, radcon personnel had confirmed there was no uncontrolled spread of contamination. Within 4 hours, normal operation was restored. Overall, it appears that operators responded per procedure, equipment functioned as designed, and there was no radioactive release to the environment. However, DOE and LANL review of the event concluded that robustness of the facility could be improved by automatically restoring power to ventilation, similar to that done in other nuclear facilities. This appears to be an improvement worth pursuing.

**Improving Nuclear Facility Operations:** Last week, BWXT Services issued a report on their 4-month evaluation of LANL strengths and weaknesses in nuclear facility operations and made recommendations for improvements. Overall, BWXT observed that LANL nuclear facilities are well managed in many respects, and that LANL is capable of identifying problems and developing appropriate solutions but frequently has difficulty instituting lasting change. The report also identified good practices and areas of excellence that are starting points to build overall improvement. The site rep understands that LANL is reviewing the report and recommendations.

**Recommendations 94-1/2000-1:** On Tuesday, LANL personnel provided a briefing on their current assessment of the 94-1 inventory, prioritization, stabilization processes, disposition options, and tentative schedules. This was a "shot-in-time," which supports DOE developing a response to the issues raised in the Board letter of March 23, 2001. The staff is planning further discussions with LANL in the coming weeks on the status of 94-1 planning and activities.