

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

September 21, 2001

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. Kent Fortenberry, Technical Director
FROM: C. H. Keilers, Jr.
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Report for Week Ending September 21, 2001

Chemistry and Metallurgical Research Building (CMR): On Tuesday morning, a security checkpoint was set up at the CMR southeast gate and that gate was opened to provide access to the TA-3 Admin building parking lot. The CMR facility estimates that this has increased traffic flow around two sides of the CMR building by an order of magnitude, since the CMR southeast gate was previously closed to thru-traffic.

The site rep understands that neither the CMR facility management nor the DOE-LAAO operations or authorization basis staff were involved in the decision making process to reroute traffic inside the fence in close proximity to the CMR building – a Hazard Category 2 Nuclear Facility. Subsequent DOE and LANL reviews identified several new safety issues created by rerouting traffic.

On Thursday, the facility submitted and DOE approved a “backward looking,” unreviewed safety question (USQ) on the rerouted traffic. LANL identified the USQ as positive because of a new accident scenario and a new failure mode for a safety class system, created by the traffic rerouting. As a result of the backward looking USQ, LANL has taken compensatory measures to address these new safety issues.

While the compensatory measures taken appear to be adequate in the short-term, the site rep believes that the decision-making process followed was not unified and was not consistent with the principles of integrated safety management. Key decisions were made quickly with little involvement of the knowledgeable and responsible personnel, particularly for operations and safety. Key steps of the process, such as completing a USQ before the action, were skipped. The site rep acknowledges that there are times when senior management needs to make expeditious decisions. However, considering how quickly the safety review process was completed later in the week, it appears in hindsight that the correct process could have been expeditiously followed in this case.