

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

February 14, 2003

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. Kent Fortenberry, Technical Director
FROM: C. H. Keilers, Jr.
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Report for Week Ending February 14, 2003

Facility Operations: LANL is proceeding with facility management realignment and consolidation under a site-wide Justification for Continued Operation, JCO (site rep weekly 11/29/02). The goal is that this unified organization would identify, plan, and implement needed improvements while minimally impacting nuclear facility operations. This effort appears well-motivated and is intended to address real institutional needs. The JCO expires in April and may require attention to ensure it is adequately closed out by that time.

LANL has stated that roles and responsibilities during this transition would remain consistent with current, specific AB requirements. The site rep has observed that several key personnel in facility operations (e.g., from TA-55, CMR) are being transferred to other LANL areas that need assistance. While this addresses institutional needs, less-experienced personnel may now be called upon to recognize and respond to emergent conditions in these facilities. This aspect is worth considering in the timing and selection of these transfers. Longer term, LANL management appears to recognize the needs for improvements in succession planning, training, and mentoring of operations personnel.

Authorization Basis (AB): The site rep believes that the NNSA site office and LANL can achieve the April 10th deadline for AB upgrades here, but it is going to be tight. It depends on quality of LANL analysis and documentation and ability of NNSA to spot issues and provide feedback early.

Last week, LANL resubmitted the TA-54 (Area G) AB upgrade package, which was revised to address NNSA comments (site rep weekly 1/24/03). This week, NNSA sent back the Radiography Facility (TA-8-23) AB package, which LANL submitted last September. The Radiography Facility is in an older building (1940s era). It was added to the nuclear facility list in 2000 and has been operating to a JCO. The building lacks seismic, confinement, and engineered fire suppression features and is heated by a natural gas fired boiler. This facility radiographs high explosive and nuclear components, including sealed heat sources containing Pu-238 oxide. NNSA raised several issues involving the conservatism in natural gas deflagration calculations and the completeness of analyses and of the proposed controls, particularly for the heat sources.

Longer term, NNSA and LANL are beginning to plan for how to maintain and continuously improve the ABs. The site rep believes that the annual update process here previously has been ineffective and thereby contributed to past AB violations, AB near-misses, and AB-operations interface issues. LANL appears to be moving toward an improved, resource-loaded annual update process.

Waste Management: The TA-54 Radioassay and Nondestructive Testing facility (RANT) is key to the Quick-to-WIPP risk reduction program, since it is used to load WIPP shipping containers (site rep weekly 12/6/02). RANT is approved to operate as a Hazard Category 2 (HC-2) under a limited Basis for Interim Operation (BIO) that expires on June 1, 2003. DOE is conducting a readiness assessment (RA) next week to verify implementation of this limited BIO. The site rep understands that the full BIO has slipped to late April, leaving about 1 month for its review, approval, implementation, and verification (i.e., RAs). Timing appears problematic and worthy of management attention to ensure an adequate, implemented RANT safety basis while best supporting the Quick-to-WIPP program.