

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

July 27, 2012

MEMORANDUM FOR: T. J. Dwyer, Technical Director
FROM: B.P. Broderick and R.T. Davis
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Report for Week Ending July 27, 2012

Staff member R. Verhaagen was onsite this week.

WCRR Repackaging Facility – Safety Basis: This week, WCRR repackaging facility management declared a Technical Safety Requirement (TSR) violation based on the failure to perform a required surveillance within its prescribed frequency. The WCRR TSRs require a weekly combustible loading surveillance to be performed in and around outdoor transportainers used to stage transuranic waste drums awaiting processing or shipment. This surveillance requirement, which came into effect in January 2012, is implemented as a part of the performance of facility rounds. Prior to January 2012, all of the TSR-level surveillance requirements implemented via rounds applied only to the interior of the WCRR building and no rounds-based surveillances were tied to the outside transportainers or the yard. As a result, operations personnel had historically not performed rounds when material at risk was removed from the WCRR building because no rounds-based surveillances were required when the building was in cold standby mode.

Problems with the WCRR drum lift have caused facility operations to be suspended and the building to be placed in cold standby mode for much of the last six weeks. Following past practice, operations personnel did not perform rounds while the WCRR building was de-inventoried and in cold standby mode. However, material at risk was present in the transportainers, meaning the associated combustible loading surveillance was required to be performed. This resulted in the weekly transportainer combustible loading surveillance to be missed on several occasions in June and July. In response, facility management is evaluating the extent of condition and developing corrective actions.

Weapons Engineering Tritium Facility (WETF): In July 2010, WETF successfully completed an NNSA Operational Readiness Review allowing the facility to restart programmatic tritium gas handling activities after an extended operational suspension. WETF personnel had been pursuing restart of the balance of the facility in a phased approach and planned to perform both contractor and federal readiness assessments in September and October 2012, respectively, to support tritium gas transfer operations from the function tester glovebox to the load-in glovebox. However, based on the time elapsed since the last gas transfer and function test operations (over 1 year), LANL is now proposing to include these operations as part of the upcoming readiness assessments. The LANL Joint Evaluation Team met this week to discuss the readiness plans for these operations and recommended both federal and contractor readiness assessments. LANL is revising the readiness assessment Plan of Action to be consistent with this approach. WETF management plans to resume programmatic tritium operations in November following successful completion of the readiness assessments.

Area G - Readiness: On Tuesday, the site office approved the LANL Plan of Action for the performance of the drum venting contractor readiness assessment that is scheduled to start on Monday. The site office manager has been delegated as the startup authorization authority for this activity. In June, Area G personnel completed a management self assessment and began venting drums with less than hazard category 3 material quantities. The readiness assessment team will observe venting operations with these type drums next week. A federal readiness assessment is also scheduled to be performed in September prior to beginning hazard category 3 operations.