

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

October 18, 2013

MEMORANDUM FOR: S.A. Stokes, Acting Technical Director
FROM: R.T. Davis and R.K. Verhaagen
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Report for Week Ending October 18, 2013

Based on the temporary resolution of federal appropriations, the Laboratory Director cancelled the planned suspension of operations that was scheduled to occur on Friday. All LANS employees are expected to report to work as normal. As some LANL operations had already been impacted, the Director emphasized that the resumption of activities should be performed in a methodical and deliberate manner. In the last few weeks, considerable site effort has been focused on the planning and execution of a safe laboratory shutdown. NNSA has communicated to LANL that these plans be finalized over the next few weeks for potential use in the future.

Transuranic Solid Waste Operations: Environmental and Waste Management Operations (EWMO) including Area G, the WCRR repackaging facility, and the RANT shipping facility were placed into a safe shutdown mode last week due to lack of funding. This included suspension of most LANL subcontract work in these areas. EWMO management has developed a resumption plan that will be implemented next week to bring subcontractors back onsite and conduct a deliberate release of programmatic work to support completion of the 3706 campaign.

Plutonium Facility – Safety Basis: Last week, LANL requested an extension for two Evaluations of the Safety of the Situation (ESS) for refueling activities (see 3/16/12 weekly) and ammonium nitrate in the exhaust ventilation (see 7/23/10 weekly). These ESSs were intended to be closed during the 2012 safety basis annual update; however, the safety basis was never approved. These issues are also addressed in the most recent annual update that was submitted in September.

As noted above, LANL submitted the 2013 annual update for the Plutonium Facility last month. The major changes in this safety basis include the following: 1) incorporation of most field office comments from the 2012 annual update; 2) inclusion of additional transuranic waste activities (see 10/4/13 weekly); 3) changes to support closure of ESSs (including two mentioned above) and Potential Inadequacies of the Safety Analysis; 4) resolution of comments in the 2011 Safety Evaluation Report; and 5) re-evaluation of the leak path factor for the seismic accident scenario. The field office is currently reviewing the revised safety basis.

Area G – Safety Basis: There are approximately 25 unvented drums containing transuranic waste in Area G that cannot be processed by the existing drum venting system (DVS) because they are either too large or exceed the DVS weight limit. The Area G safety basis currently prohibits opening unvented drums due to the potential for hydrogen buildup and deflagration. In order to process these drums, Area G personnel submitted a temporary safety basis modification request to the field office for review and approval. The safety basis modification would allow workers to remove potentially unvented 55 gallon drums nested in potentially unvented 85 gallon drum overpacks nested in 110 gallon unvented drum overpacks. In its response, the field office noted that the proposed activity does not have the capability to attach a lid restraint onto the nested 55 gallon drum or the nested 85 gallon overpack and could thereby expose the worker to potential injury from a postulated lid ejection scenario. The field office provided LANL with additional comments and direction to revise and resubmit the safety basis for approval before it will allow this activity.