

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

March 27, 2015

MEMORANDUM FOR: S.A. Stokes, Technical Director
FROM: R.K. Verhaagen and J.W. Plaue
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Report for Week Ending March 27, 2015

DNFSB Staff Activity: Staff member D.J. Campbell was on site this week to observe a federal readiness assessment (FRA) in the Plutonium Facility and to augment site rep activities.

Federal Oversight: On Monday, the DOE Office of Environmental Management stood up a local Field Office to oversee work scope performed at LANL. For an interim period, the NNSA Field Office will continue to perform primary nuclear safety approval and oversight functions with some documents requiring concurrence from Environmental Management Headquarters.

Area G–Nitrate Salts: On March 13, the NNSA Field Office approved the revised Evaluation of the Safety of the Situation (ESS) for the continued storage of the remediated nitrate salt wastes (see 3/6/15 weekly). The Field Office approval determined that LANL’s proposed Specific Administrative Controls for temperature monitoring and headspace gas monitoring were no longer necessary.

Last week, the LANL Explosives Review Committee issued a memo indicating that certain surrogate mixtures for the remediated nitrate salt wastes were sensitive to electrostatic discharge at levels of 25 mJ when tested in bounding physical forms (i.e., finely ground powders). The memo notes that the Faraday shielding provided by the drums will mitigate this concerns for storage applications, but recommends the use of non-sparking tools and electrical bonding for intrusive work with these materials. Area G management has reviewed this information and is incorporating the recommendations into planning for the final treatment process.

Plutonium Facility–Restart Activities: The FRA for the T-Base II machining operation commenced this week. This is the first FRA to occur as a part of the restart activities to resume operations following the LANL Director’s pause in June 2013. Notable activities included the observation of a machining performance demonstration, the conduct of an evaluated operations drill, personnel interviews, facility and system walk-downs, and document reviews. The FRA will continue through next week with an out-brief scheduled to occur on Friday.

Weapons Engineering Tritium Facility (WETF)–Safety Systems and Conduct of Maintenance: WETF personnel continue to struggle to complete the maintenance and testing necessary to restore operability of a safety significant fire door, the halon fire suppression system, and the fixed wet-pipe fire sprinkler system (see 2/13/15 weekly). Most recently, a series of work packages were used to adjust and test the fire door as well as to troubleshoot and repair an intermittent halon system fire panel alarm. Following completion of the work packages and their specified testing, facility personnel restored the operability of the systems and exited the fire watch necessitated by the limiting conditions for operations. During a review of the completed work package for the fire door, the NNSA Facility Representative noted issues with the performance and documentation of the post maintenance testing. Additionally, a subsequent NNSA Facility Representative review of the work package for the halon system identified that it was incomplete. The systems were again declared inoperable and the fire watch re-entered.