

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

October 6, 2000

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. K. Fortenberry, Technical Director
FROM: H. Waugh and W. White, Pantex Site Representatives
SUBJECT: Pantex Plant Activity Report for Week Ending October 6, 2000

DNFSB Activity Summary: H. Waugh and W. White were on site all week. Tom Burns was on site Wednesday to attend the pit management meeting. A. Matteucci was on site Wednesday to review start up of 12-104A, Bay 24. T. Huntley was on site Wednesday through Friday to review 12-104A, Bay 24, and to observe ongoing weapons operations.

W88 Contractor Readiness Assessment: The contractor readiness assessment for the W88 New Authorization Basis Implementation ended on Thursday. The W88 program failed in four key areas: configuration management, maintenance, authorization basis flow down, and operations (procedures). The readiness assessment team noted that the MHC technical assist and its associated report did not provide support to project management in declaring readiness to proceed. To start up W88 operations, MHC must close identified pre-start findings and prepare action plans for post-start findings. In addition, those areas which failed will have to undergo another readiness assessment by the contractor.^[II.A]

Lightning Protection for Manifold Operations: On Wednesday night, the Pantex Operations Center issued a lightning warning after detecting a nearby lightning strike. Production technicians were required to return to the plant to disconnect a nuclear explosive from manifold equipment in 12-104, Bay 16, as required in the site-wide TSRs. From the time lightning warnings were issued, it took 2.5 hours, according to the Operations Center log, to establish adequate stand off distance for the nuclear explosive in Bay 16. The lightning warning criteria in the Lightning BIO and in the site-wide TSRs may not be adequate if MHC requires more than 2 hours to shut down at-risk operations.^[II.A]

Paint Bay Operations: MHC and DOE have begun plans to replace the facility previously used for painting nuclear explosives, 12-41, with the newest paint facility, 12-104A, Bay 24. The newer facility has never been authorized for nuclear operations. DOE and MHC have indicated a desire to start up 12-104A, Bay 24, for nuclear operations using a path forward that appears less stringent than the current, parallel Special Purpose Facility BIO Program Plan for 12-104A. Within the next several weeks, MHC will formalize this path forward and submit it to DOE for approval. Currently, no weapons authorization agreement allows painting operations in 12-41. According to MHC personnel, no nuclear explosives have been painted in several years. It appears that process flows can be changed to allow painting requirements to be met without bringing nuclear explosives into 12-41. In light of the lack of operational need to paint nuclear explosives now or in the immediate future, it is not clear what DOE or MHC expects to gain from expending authorization basis resources to accomplish start-up of a facility with an authorization basis that does not meet current expectations. As 12-41 currently is used only for non-nuclear operations, it is unclear why MHC and DOE do not start up 12-104A, Bay 24, as a non-nuclear facility with start up of nuclear operations accomplished through the Special Purpose Facility BIO.^[II.A]

Pit Management Meeting: The pit management team meet on Wednesday to discuss the current status of the repackaging effort and to outline the future direction of the program. Despite numerous assurances to the contrary, it is clear that the pit repackaging effort has not received adequate priority. Unless the Department is willing to raise the priority of the repackaging effort, Recommendation 99-1 commitments will not be met, and pits will not be repackaged into an acceptable environment within the anticipated 5 year time period.^[II.A]