

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

August 23, 2002

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. K. Fortenberry, Technical Director
FROM: W. White, Pantex Site Representative
SUBJECT: Pantex Plant Activity Report for Week Ending August 23, 2002

DNFSB Activity Summary: W. White was on site all week.

Emergency Exercise: On Thursday, a no-notice drill occurred at the Pantex Plant. The exercise scenario involved an accidental, onsite release of chlorine. All plant personnel participated in the exercise, as did many off-site emergency personnel.

The immediate response by BWXT personnel to the event went well. Onsite transportation operations were suspended, with ongoing movements being allowed to complete. Plant personnel were ordered to shelter in place, and nuclear and explosive operations were suspended. Emergency response personnel reported to the emergency operations center in a timely manner. However, there was some initial confusion as to whether emergency response personnel should shelter in place or report to the operations center. Also, there were indications that not all plant personnel received the shelter-in-place notification in a timely manner.

Many of the primary emergency response personnel from both BWXT and OASO were offsite at the time of the exercise, leading to a useful, albeit unintended, demonstration of emergency response functions by backup personnel. The BWXT General Manager, Deputy General Manager, and several directors were offsite, as was the OASO Director, Deputy Director, and security advisor. Communications within the operations center went reasonably well, but communications between personnel in the operations center and personnel on scene did not always follow established protocols, leading to some confusion in the response by industrial hygiene personnel. As has been the case with past exercises, followup communications with off-site personnel could use improvement. OASO personnel responsible for keeping offsite emergency personnel informed were unable to set up a communications bridge in a timely manner with offsite emergency operations centers. [II.A]

W79 Procedural Violation: On Monday, BWXT personnel discovered an explosive component in a storage facility had been improperly labeled as a non-explosive component. Further investigation determined that this component had not been tracked and moved as an explosive component, violating plant procedures. The component was originally packaged by W79 production technicians who packaged and labeled the part incorrectly. The correct explosive categorization of this component when packaged is 1.4d, which is the label normally applied by production personnel to the component. The existing closeout procedure for packaging the component required it to be packaged and labeled as a 1.1d explosive, an error in the procedure. Labeling the part correctly, as had been done in the past, appears to have been an ongoing violation of the existing procedure. In the case of this occurrence, production personnel had not labeled the component as an explosive, leading to a violation of material movement procedures. Open questions from the occurrence revolve around the adequacy of the procedure used to package the component, the conduct of operations by W79 production technicians, and the manner in which the categorization of components is verified prior to movement. [II.A]

Special Nuclear Material Component Requalification Facility (SNMCRF): On Tuesday, Board staff participated in a telephone conference with the Pantex Plant to discuss the ongoing SNMCRF project. This project will implement various non-destructive examination techniques, as well as a pit tube replacement capability, in existing facilities. Pit tube replacement will require work in a glovebox environment. Staff will begin a more detailed review of the project following completion of the preliminary safety analysis later this year. [II.A]