

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

MEMO TO: J. Kent Fortenberry, Technical Director
FROM: Timothy Hunt and Dave Kupferer, Pantex Site Representatives
DATE: 31 March 2006
SUBJECT: Pantex Plant Weekly Report

DNFSB Staff Activity: J. Shackelford, A. Matteucci, and outside expert R. Lewis were onsite to review hoisting and rigging, tooling, and maintenance programs. R. Rauch and outside expert L. McGrew were onsite to observe the W56 and W76 Nuclear Explosive Safety (NES) change evaluations.

Weapon Component Aging: In October 2005, Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) issued an information engineering release (IER) that discussed an emerging concern regarding component aging in a specific weapon system. These aging issues have not impacted any ongoing weapon related operations to date. Last week, LANL issued another IER that appears to be a request for Pantex to consider restarting non-SS-21 disassembly operations for this weapon program, which would allow additional data to be gathered regarding the aging issue. Restarting these operations would require significant efforts including convening a NES study to review the process and either obtaining an exemption to the requirements of Title 10, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 830 (Rule) or developing a Rule complaint Hazard Analysis Report.

Grass Fires: An extremely dry winter and high winds have resulted in several severe wildfires in the Texas panhandle recently. On Thursday, the Pantex Fire Department responded to a couple grass fires northeast of Amarillo and west of the plant site. The operations center was staffed with additional Emergency Management personnel as a precaution because weather conditions had the potential to cause the fire to impact plant operations. Gusting winds in excess of 50 miles per hour drove the fires in the direction of the site. The fires were contained by Thursday evening and never approached closer than about 12 miles to the plant.

Weapon Program Rule Compliance: In January 2003, NNSA granted the following extensions for BWXT to submit Rule compliant Documented Safety Analyses (DSAs) for weapon disassembly and dismantlement operations (the Rule required contractors to submit DSAs by 10 April 2003): B61 by 28 February 2005, W76 by 30 November 2006, W80 by 30 September 2005, B83 by 31 May 2004, W84 by 30 November 2005, W87 by 31 July 2004, and W88 by 31 July 2004. To date, rule compliant DSAs have been submitted that analyze B61, W78, B83, and W87 operations. The remaining DSAs are currently scheduled to be completed as follows: W76 by January 2007, W80 by February 2007, W84 is currently unknown, W88 by November 2006. The Rule also requires each DSA to be updated annually or the contractor must submit a letter stating that there have been no changes. Previously, the annual updates were required to be submitted by the end of each calendar year. In an attempt to optimize its limited DSA approval resources, PXSO has directed BWXT to develop a schedule for submitting DSA updates that would allow for a couple submittals a month. PXSO has also granted BWXT a three month grace period for the annual update requirement. BWXT has historically submitted the annual updates in a timely manner.

Building 12-64: BWXT senior management recently stated that it may be able to forego upgrading the 12-64 bays if multi-unit operations are approved and production activities are performed more widely on multiple shifts. More off-shift operations would require the hiring of additional production technicians and would reduce the amount of time facilities are available for periodic and emergent maintenance. BWXT production planning personnel are developing options for NNSA-HQ consideration on how throughput can be optimized to preclude the need for 17 nuclear explosive bays in Building 12-64. In the meantime, PXSO is still anticipating that the previous upgrade bidders will provide best-and-final offers by June.