

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

November 7, 2025

TO: Technical Director
FROM: Nevada National Security Sites (NNSS) Cognizant Engineer
SUBJECT: NNSS Report for October 2025

DNFSB Staff Activity: During the week of October 14, a DNFSB staff review team observed the federal readiness assessment (FRA) for the enhanced staging program (ESP) at Device Assembly Facility (DAF). The FRA was conducted in accordance with Department of Energy (DOE) Order 425.1D, *Verification of Readiness to Start up or Restart Nuclear Facilities* requirements. The FRA scope included an abnormal event drill and demonstrations of planned ESP operations at DAF similar to the demonstrations performed during the contractor readiness assessment (see NNSS Monthly Report for September 2025). The FRA team could not complete its assessment or issue a report due to a lapse in government appropriations and will resume activities once funds are available.

On October 17, 2025, the Board issued a letter to the Secretary of Energy requesting additional information on the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) recent decision to eliminate the planned installation of a fire extinguishing system (FES) at the Principal Underground Laboratory for Subcritical Experimentation (PULSE). The Board emphasized, without a FES, NNSA will not have a system to extinguish a fire in a test bed with an uncontained subcritical experiment that grows past its incipient stage. The FES could prevent a fire-initiated explosion that aerosolizes or disperses radiological material. The Board advised DOE to finalize a nuclear safety control strategy that embodies DOE's preferred hierarchy of safety controls at PULSE.

Update to Fire Protection Strategy at PULSE: On September 30, 2025, the NNSA Central Technical Authority and Cognizant Secretarial Officer conditionally approved the permanent exemption to DOE Order 420.1C, *Facility Safety*, fire protection requirements to forego a FES at PULSE (see NNSS Monthly Report for August 2025). The condition of approval is contingent on completing additional fire modeling and sensitivity analyses that show the final safety control set can effectively mitigate design basis fires. The condition of approval further stated the analyses must be completed and submitted to Nevada Field Office (NFO) no later than April 2, 2027. As noted in the October 17, 2025, letter, the Board advised DOE and NNSA to maintain frequent engagement with the Board as NNSA pursues the additional analyses to finalize its control strategy for fire-initiated explosions at PULSE.

NFO Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Site Integrated Assessment Plan (SIAP): On September 30, 2025, NFO submitted the FY 2026 site integrated assessment plan and master assessment schedule to NNSA headquarters as required by NNSA Supplemental Directive 226.1D, *NNSA Site Assurance and Oversight*. The plan described the process NFO federal staff use to determine the type of assessments and oversight activities planned at NNSS facilities. The SIAP lists 61 new formal and shadow assessments, including two external independent assessments. Some of the assessments identified are federal oversight of Mission Support and Test Services, LLC (MSTS) assessments related to safety management programs (e.g., emergency preparedness, fire protection).

First Quarter Start-up Notification Report (SNR): On October 2, 2025, MSTS submitted the FY 2026 first quarter SNR to NFO for review and approval in accordance with DOE Order 425.1D requirements. In the report, the startup schedule to begin ESP operations is planned later in the calendar year following completion of the FRA, and the schedule for startup of 6-foot vessel operations is revised. A new readiness schedule for the assembly building project was added to the SNR for FY 2026.