

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

March 13, 2026

TO: Technical Director
FROM: Pantex Plant Resident Inspectors
SUBJECT: Pantex Plant Activity Report for Week Ending March 13, 2026

Staff Activity: This week, DNFSB staff members were onsite to provide resident-inspector augmentation and evaluate an emergency exercise.

Emergency Exercise: This week, Pantex conducted a full-scale emergency exercise involving aerosolized dispersal of special nuclear material caused by high-explosive detonation in a nuclear explosive cell within a material access area. The exercise plan involved response and coordination from various onsite organizations, including security, the fire department, radiation safety, and emergency-response organization personnel. Specific topics evaluated by the DNFSB staff during the emergency exercise included (1) communications between internal Pantex organizations, (2) transition of command and control at the event scene, (3) activation and standup of the emergency response organization, and (4) response to radiological contamination.

Special Tooling: Last week, PXD Tooling and Machine Design (TMD) personnel paused the use of certain vacuum-lifting fixtures after discovering that normal use of the tooling was not meeting the necessary safety margins for load-bearing equipment per tooling-program requirements (see 3/6/2026 report). This week, PXD conducted a fact-finding meeting on this topic. In 2025, PXD modified this fixture, allowing it to be credited to prevent certain impact scenarios. As explained in the fact-finding meeting, during development of this tooling, PXD TMD engineers evaluated the fixture based on the assumption that it only supported the weight of the component being lifted; however, production technicians used the tooling to also apply an upward force to dislodge the component. Due to this misunderstanding, PXD TMD engineers did not factor this additional force into their analyses to prove the tooling would maintain structural integrity and positive control within minimum safety margins during use. Furthermore, PXD noted multiple occurrences where visible bending of the tooling was observed by technicians while applying force to dislodge the component. As a result of this meeting, PXD plans to (1) continue pausing the use of these fixtures, (2) update the tooling analyses to reflect actual expected loading conditions, (3) update applicable disassembly procedures with recommendations that limit tooling deformations during use, and (4) update the Pantex *Special Tooling Design Manual* to clarify safety factors for such special tooling that lift and apply an upward force. Additionally, this week, PXD safety-analysis engineering personnel declared a potential inadequacy of the safety analysis for this discovery. The application of an upward force to dislodge the stuck component results in tensile forces, for which PXD had not previously analyzed or received weapon response from the applicable design agency. PXD established operational restrictions to continue prohibiting use of these fixtures.

Exemption Request: This week, PFO sent a memo to the NNSA Associate Administrator for Environment, Safety, and Health endorsing an exemption—from all requirements within Subpart B, *Safety Basis Requirements*, of Title 10, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 830, *Nuclear Safety Management*—for existing facilities within a material access area used for staging and transportation of nuclear explosives and special nuclear material. This request follows a similar, recently approved exemption for the Material Staging Capability project (see 2/27/2026 report).