

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

March 6, 2026

TO: Technical Director
FROM: Oak Ridge Resident Inspectors
SUBJECT: Oak Ridge Activity Report for Week Ending March 6, 2026

Building 9212: The YFO field office manager approved the DOE readiness assessment (RA) plan-of-action for the startup of the calciner operation. The resident inspector (RI) discussed the checklist assessment approach with the readiness assessment team leader and the overall scope of the assessment. Due to previous issues CNS had with preparing new activities for readiness, such as electrorefining and the low-equity vehicle, the RA team lead decided they would not perform a parallel assessment for this new activity. The federal RA performed on the low-equity vehicle was thorough and discovered further issues with CNS' readiness process, but was truncated in scope due to manning issues caused by the federal government shutdown. This full-scope readiness assessment will help YFO determine the state of CNS' readiness process as they move toward preparing the Uranium Processing Facility (UPF) for readiness activities. CNS plans to begin the implementation verification review (IVR) of the calciner later this month. The RIs plan to shadow portions of the IVR, contractor RA, and the federal RA to review the process and evaluate if CNS has implemented improvements and corrective actions from the previous RAs.

UPF: On November 24, 2025, the NNSA Y-12 Project Management Office directed the UPF project to accelerate the demonstration of the microwave-casting capability and cast an enriched uranium part by September 30, 2028. The proposed demonstration would be conducted several years in advance of the startup of the facility, currently planned for 2031. The objective of this demonstration is to show the casting capability, and not necessarily result in a component that can be fully qualified by the design agencies. To facilitate a CNS proposed approach to accomplish this demonstration, on February 13, 2026, YFO submitted to the NNSA Associate Administrator for the Office of Environment, Safety, and Health an exemption request to the criteria contained in DOE-STD-1027-92, *Hazard Categorization of DOE Nuclear Facilities*, specific to the consideration of the potential for nuclear criticality events for determining the hazard categorization of UPF for the proposed early casting activity. The exemption request states that the early casting demonstration could be conducted in multiple casting runs, though limited to a short-term evolution. The purpose of the exemption would be to relieve the UPF project from needing to have a full facility safety basis implemented prior to the early casting activity. The exemption request does state that nuclear criticality safety controls and evaluations will be developed for the early casting demonstration, and that these controls would be mostly duplicative of controls that a safety basis would identify for this limited activity. The request states that developing a safety basis "when the only significant radiological risk is the potential for nuclear criticality events is an unnecessary burden." The RIs will continue to follow the status of the exemption request and what changes to the project result from the early casting direction.