

**Department of Energy**

Albuquerque Operations
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DNF SAFETY BOARD

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The Honorable John T. Conway
Chairman
Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board
625 Indiana Avenue, NW
Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20004-2901

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In his July 3rd letter, General Gioconda stated the Amarillo Area Office would provide a summary of near-term compensatory actions taken at Pantex related to a potential safety issue associated with Canned Sub-Assemblies (CSA). That issue is whether a CSA is more sensitive to thermal insult than previously considered in the Pantex safety analysis.

There are four weapons programs at Pantex to which the CSA issue is applicable. These are the W76, W78, W80, and W88. Currently, the only ongoing program is the W78. Operations consist of repair work that requires removal but not disassembly of the physics package. W80 operations are authorized, but the only near-term activity is a command disable test scheduled for August. W76 and W88 operations are not currently authorized. The results of the ongoing CSA analysis effort will be incorporated into the W76, W80, and W88 program's safety basis prior to beginning operations.

Pantex is currently treating the CSA issue as a potential inadequacy in the safety analysis (i.e., preliminary information indicates the hazard associated with the CSA may not be adequately analyzed). In accordance with DOE Order 5480.21 paragraph 10.d, the contractor has notified DOE of the issue via the Occurrence Reporting System and is in the process of evaluating the situation under the Unreviewed Safety Question process. That process will complete following the analysis work currently underway at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). Initial compensatory controls were instituted by Mason & Hanger Corporation (MHC) on May 7. Those controls consisted of a requirement to increase the stand-off distance for Class A and B combustibles from nuclear explosives (both staged and in-process) and a requirement to verify combustible materials are within limits prior to the start of work. Additionally, MHC has installed two approved fire cabinets, removed one table, and covered the remaining tables with fire retardant barrier paper in the bay used for W78 operations to further reduce the combustible loading in the facility and reduce the possibility of fire propagation. The fire cabinets provide a fire barrier for day use supplies, testers, cables, and parts. An additional control of enclosing two information boards in a glass covered metal frame will be completed by July 14. W78 operations also occur in mass properties and radiography facilities. Improved combustible controls are also being applied to the mass properties and radiography facilities since W78 operations are conducted in those bays.

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The above fire protection measures incorporate fire barriers for transient and facility combustibles and additional stand-off distance. Those compensatory measures are an accelerated implementation of controls that are expected to stem from completion of the Fire Basis for Interim Operation and provide an improved level of fire safety. MHC is also working to complete the activation of ultraviolet detector activated deluge fire suppression. The physical work is scheduled to be complete by the end of the fiscal year followed shortly thereafter by revision of the authorization basis and a readiness review. Based on these actions and the preliminary information from LANL indicating that the high explosive response bounds Fogbank response, the Area Office is satisfied that prudent controls are in place pending final resolution of the issue. Any questions you may have should be directed to me at (806) 477-3180 or Don Brunell of my staff at (806) 477-3053.

Sincerely,



Daniel E. Glenn
Area Manager

cc:

M. Whitaker, S-3.1