

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

February 25, 2022

MEMORANDUM FOR: Christopher J. Roscetti, Technical Director
FROM: D. Gutowski and J. Plaue, Resident Inspectors
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Activity Report for Week Ending February 25, 2022

Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Building: Subcontractor personnel recently commenced more invasive decontamination and decommissioning activities such as glovebox removal. Last week, during removal of the first glovebox, a continuous air monitor alarmed. The work crew, who were wearing respiratory protection, evacuated the room. Responding radiological control technicians found contamination on the personal protective equipment of several individuals. They found no skin contamination, no evidence of any uptakes, but areas of substantial contamination in the room and adjacent areas. The air monitor alarmed shortly after subcontractor personnel removed and replaced a plug from the glovebox to drain possible oil holdup. At the fact-finding, personnel discussed several areas in need of improvements. Most prominently, the group discussed the need to ensure ventilation systems are configured optimally for the work. In this case, subcontractor personnel had placed plastic sheeting around the room that may have obstructed ventilation exhaust intakes. Additionally, ventilation draw on the glovebox being removed may not have been maximized. A second prominent topic of discussion involved improved planning and controls for breaching contaminated systems. In this case, subcontractor personnel breached the glovebox confinement without the aid of a glovebag, local task exhaust, or continuous monitoring by a radiological control technician. Other areas discussed included improving housekeeping and ensuring correct anti-contamination clothing for potential hazards such as contaminated oil.

Sigma Facility: On Wednesday evening, facility personnel noticed smoke and evacuated the building after pulling the fire alarm. The two people present evacuated without issues. The Los Alamos County Fire Department responded and extinguished a smoking piece of equipment in a radiological area with one fire extinguisher followed by water for cooling. No contamination was released by the fire. Researchers reported finishing an experiment with the piece of equipment about an hour before the event without any apparent issues. The fire department is investigating the cause of the incident.

Federal Oversight: On Wednesday, a six-person team led by an individual from the NNSA Production Office commenced an assessment of conduct of operations in the Plutonium Facility. The primary purpose of the assessment is to evaluate the effectiveness of Triad's corrective actions from several negative events that occurred last year (see 4/2/2021 and 7/23/2021 reports), as well as overall compliance with requirements for conduct of operations. NNSA is also using this assessment as part of a broader effort to ensure enhanced and sustainable formality of operations at all its sites after a recent review indicated that there has not been a measurable reduction in events during the past 10 years despite numerous corrective actions. The team is expected to complete their onsite observations by March 18, 2022.