

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

August 26, 2022

MEMORANDUM FOR: Christopher J. Roscetti, Technical Director
FROM: A. Boussouf and D. Gutowski, Resident Inspectors
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Activity Report for Week Ending August 26, 2022

DNFSB Staff Activity: A. Boussouf provided support to the acting resident inspector at Pantex.

Transuranic Waste Facility (TWF): Last Thursday, there was a violation of the Technical Safety Requirements at TWF. Workers began moving drums in a waste storage building that was in warm standby mode (waste is present, but only limited operations are allowed) rather than in operations mode as required for moving waste drums. The building had stayed in warm standby mode due to maintenance being performed on the fire suppression system. Due to errors in communications, the facility mode was not recognized. As soon as they discovered the unallowed work, facility personnel paused the drum movements and ensured all waste was in safe condition. Facility management is evaluating means to improve communications and work release processes to prevent this type of error occurring in the future.

Work Planning and Control: Last Thursday, electrical safety officers paused work in a building adjacent to the Radioactive Liquid Waste Treatment Facility. Electricians, including vendor personnel were working on installation of radio frequency welders. The electrical safety officers noted that shorting jumpers were not installed on the capacitor bank to ensure that they were discharged. The work instructions for this task did not identify this hazard. Facility management plans to rework the instructions for this activity following a new planning walkdown with renewed attention to the scope, hazards, and controls. They also plan to reinforce rules regarding vendor participation in potentially hazardous activities. Longer term, there is an existing effort to evaluate work planning and control processes at the laboratory.

Plutonium Facility–Criticality Safety: Last Tuesday, a can containing fissile material was moved without an appropriate engineered spacer present as required. Responding personnel determined the condition was safe and allowed an immediate in the field correction to add a spacer. In the follow-up fact-finding meeting for the event, personnel noted that field correction may not have been allowable in this situation and the infraction level is being re-evaluated.

Area G: On Wednesday, N3B personnel performed an emergency response drill as part of the management self-assessment for startup of size reduction operations of corrugated metal pipes. The scenario involved a rigging failure in the Dome 375 Permacon with the winch hook disconnecting from the bag holding the corrugated metal pipe while it is being advanced to the cutting shear. The hook then struck the winch operator in the chest. Players in the drill noted this was a realistic scenario as it involved one of the more challenging movements during the planned operation. One key item identified during the drill was the need to improve radiological control practices during casualties in contamination areas.

Waste Characterization, Reduction, and Repackaging Facility (WCRRF): On Tuesday, Triad submitted to the NNSA Field Office for approval a safety design strategy for restart of WCRRF as a hazard category 3 nuclear facility (see 5/13/2022 report). The strategy relies heavily on an inventory control to constrain accident consequences.