

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

January 21, 2005

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. Kent Fortenberry, Technical Director
FROM: T. D. Burns Jr. and C. H. Keilers, Jr.
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Report for Week Ending January 21, 2005

Winters was on site this week to discuss LANL-WIPP interaction.

Resumption Status: This week, the LANL Director presented to LANL his assessment of status: operational safety, security, and compliance have improved as a result of the resumption effort; they are now satisfactory; and they will continue to improve as a result of initiatives such as the Operational Efficiency Project and a new effort focused on behavior-based safety. The NNSA Site Office view is that LANL deserves credit for a largely successful resumption effort, completed in 6 months, that identified thousands of issues; however, it remains to be seen whether LANL can succeed at evaluating the issues systematically and at implementing consistent and effective longer-term corrective actions. Currently, LANL is running behind earlier expectations on both institutional and local corrective actions. NNSA is pursuing federal staff augmentation to improve federal oversight of these activities.

The site reps observe that LANL could increase its chances for success by following up on improvements to the LANL corrective action program suggested a year ago by an assist team from the Institute for Nuclear Power Operations (INPO); LANL could also establish an institutional body to ensure a consistent level of quality in the corrective actions. LANL is considering such initiatives.

Waste Operations: The Quick-to-WIPP program is intended to expeditiously ship the roughly 2,000 highest activity drums at LANL to WIPP and thereby reduce the risks associated with the highest consequence accident postulated at LANL in approved safety analyses; it would also provide much needed operating margin for both TA-54 Area G waste operations and the TA-55 Plutonium Facility.

LANL's last shipment to WIPP was in October 2003. Drum characterization resumed this month. LANL now expects to resume shipping drums in April 2005 and to complete Quick-to-WIPP in June 2006 – 21 months later than originally planned. There are a number of near-term actions needed for success, including: (a) complete and verify implementation of the Area G safety basis, which addresses the small to moderate risk accidents; (b) complete Operational Readiness Reviews and startup of the DVRS glovebox line; (c) install additional non-destructive examination capability; (d) establish a 2nd TRUPACT loading station. This effort has gone poorly since, at least, the LANL stand-down (7/16/04); the latest indicators are from the lab readiness assessment on safety basis implementation that terminated last week and the TA-50/54 resumption review report issued on January 10th. That said, the level of commitment seems to be increasing among DOE-EM (CBFO), NNSA, and LANL.

Authorization Basis (AB): LANL is pursuing the downgrade of two current nuclear facilities– the TA-8-23 Radiography Facility and the TA-21 Tritium Science and Fabrication Facility– to radiological status. This initiative is commendable from an overall risk-reduction perspective given that the age and condition of these facilities are less-than-ideal for continued long-term nuclear operations. However, the level of oversight by both LANL and the NNSA Site Office drops precipitously for facilities that are categorized as radiological. Increased attention to radiological facilities lab-wide appears warranted to ensure that residual risks are identified and addressed appropriately (site rep weekly 9/24/04).

NNSA Oversight: The Site Office facility operations group is implementing a periodic report system that should improve formal issue management on the federal side (site rep weekly 12/31/04).