

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

November 1, 2002

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. Kent Fortenberry, Technical Director
FROM: C. H. Keilers, Jr.
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Report for Week Ending November 1, 2002

The site rep was off site Monday through Thursday.

Plutonium Facility (TA-55): The Fire Protection Yard Main Replacement Project continues to make progress and is receiving increased management attention because of previously reported cost/schedule issues (site rep weekly 8/30/02). PF-4 work is completed. East pumphouse and water tank improvements should be completed within a few weeks. Two major sections of loop piping and two sets of lead-in piping remain. DOE expects the entire replacement system (i.e., connection to all the buildings) to be operational in December.

Waste Management: DOE-EM and LANL have committed to accelerating LANL characterization and offsite shipment of Transuranic (TRU) and Mixed Low Level (MLLW) legacy waste by 20 years (i.e., from 2030 to 2010). In particular, they are working to accelerate shipment of about 2,000 drums of higher-wattage TRU waste from TA-54 to WIPP by the end of FY04. This effort – referred to as the "Quick-to-WIPP" initiative – will result in a significant risk reduction for TA-54 once it is completed. While these 2,000 drums comprise about 8% by number of the TA-54 TRU drums, they are about 60% of the TA-54 accessible (above-ground) and potentially-dispersible TRU inventory.

WIPP shipments must be accelerated to achieve the planned TRU waste shipping schedule and the Quick-to-WIPP risk reduction. Two WIPP shipments were completed in FY02. LANL and the DOE Carlsbad Field Office are working to complete more than 90 shipments in FY03. In October, LANL made 3 shipments and plans another shipment next week. Future challenges include upgrading the Authorization Basis (AB) for existing waste characterization, packaging, and loading operations, as well as for new operations involving a modular unit for visual examination/repackaging and two full characterization lines.

Readiness Assessments: DOE and LANL are making needed improvements to their process for readiness assessments (RAs) and operational readiness reviews (ORRs). The site rep previously reported that the process is more expert-based than standards-based; that weaknesses in the process may have contributed to a nuclear facility performing an evolution in July before DOE validated that approved controls were in place; and that uncertainty exists in how the process will be used to validate the phased implementation of new Technical Safety Requirements (site rep weekly 8/16/02).

DOE has reviewed and LANL has issued formal institutional requirements for startup and restart of facilities and activities (LIR 300-00-08.0). A LANL supporting guidance document is nearly completed. The DOE Site Office is also formalizing its internal roles and responsibilities for assessing readiness. The site rep understands that facility coordinators will receive training on the new requirements next week. While there remains much to be done in this area (particularly for assessing the new AB implementations), this constitutes progress.