

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

May 18, 2001

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. K. Fortenberry, Technical Director
FROM: H. Waugh and W. White, Pantex Site Representatives
SUBJECT: Pantex Plant Activity Report for Week Ending May 18, 2001

DNFSB Activity Summary: H. Waugh was on site Monday through Thursday. W. White was on site all week. P. Hanna, M. Helfrich, and T. Huntley were on site Tuesday through Thursday to review the approved container program for nuclear materials.

Approved Container Program: Board staff members reviewed the approved container program this week. One issue of immediate concern is that the approved container program does not capture all nuclear material containers. The nuclear material staging program administrative control in the Pantex technical safety requirements (5.6.8) mandates that all nuclear material be staged in approved containers. The approved container program administrative control (5.6.9) requires that approved containers be captured in approved Pantex manuals, standards, and procedures. The plant standard (STD-9072) implementing the approved container program addresses three types of materials: explosives, nuclear components (secondaries, pits, RTGs, etc.), and nuclear explosives. The standard requires that containers for nuclear components be approved through the container manual (*DOE-Approved Containers for Pantex Plant Applications*). In at least two cases, the containers for nuclear material were not identified in the container manual. Since the material in these cases could not be classified as nuclear explosives or explosives, the only container approval method available under STD-9072 is inclusion in the container manual.

Another issue of concern is the impact of recent information provided by Los Alamos National Laboratory related to W76 canned sub-assemblies (CSAs). BWXT and AAO personnel did not know whether the information would impact the shipping container certification for W76 CSAs. If the new information negatively impacts the analysis supporting off-site shipping certification, the approval for on-site staging will also be affected. DOE initiated action to ensure the potential impact is evaluated.

In general, the approved container program defined in the Pantex technical safety requirements is not fully developed. Multiple, significant issues have been identified with this program by BWXT, DOE, and the Board's staff. Implementation of a more rigorous program will require time and resources that must be prioritized with other open issues at Pantex. [II.A]

Pit Repackaging Program: The pit repackaging program continued this week on a pace to repackage 200 pits for the second month in a row. However, the program shut down on Friday due to the presence of water in the repackaging bays. Water from thunderstorms on Thursday night had accumulated in the ramps and had leaked into the bays. [II.A]

W76 Lightning Protection Violation: W76 PTs initiated and performed task exhaust operations on a W76 unit on Friday morning during lightning warnings. This was a violation of Pantex technical safety requirements. A specific administrative control requirement (5.6.5.4.2.5) is that personnel suspend task exhaust operations and initiate no new task exhaust operations during lightning warnings. None of the PTs involved were familiar with the requirement. W76 personnel had not been trained on the procedure that implements this requirement (other than briefings on procedure changes) since initial training prior to start-up of W76 operations last year. More frequent refresher training may be warranted, not only for the W76 PTs, but also for personnel involved with other weapons programs. The continuing accumulation of administrative controls related to lightning, fire, transportation, etc. will require more frequent and focused training if the controls are to be effective. [II.A]