

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

December 11, 2015

MEMORANDUM FOR: S.A. Stokes, Technical Director
FROM: R.K. Verhaagen and J.W. Plaue
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Report for Week Ending December 11, 2015

Weapons Engineering Tritium Facility (WETF)–Operations: This week, WETF personnel commenced gas transfer operations following last week’s authorization to restart. This significant milestone represents the first time these operations have occurred in nearly eight years. WETF management implemented additional measures to ensure safe operations including the requirement for an assigned manager to observe and approve performance and the need to conduct a hot wash after each evolution to ensure lessons learned are carried forward. Operators demonstrated proper, deliberate, and complete performance of procedures, with particular emphasis on confirmation of expected system responses and a willingness to stop. This week’s activities included: (1) the consolidation of gas that had been resident in tanks within the tritium gas handling system for numerous years into a low pressure receiver, (2) sampling the contents of two low pressure receivers for material control and accountability purposes, and (3) removal of the low pressure receivers from the system. Facility personnel will continue to perform gas transfer operations until all gas has been removed from the tritium gas handling system. Following removal of all gas from the tritium gas handling system, WETF will be placed into a maintenance mode to facilitate necessary system modifications and upgrades that will allow processing and removal of legacy gas and a return to function testing operations.

Plutonium Facility–Seismic Safety: LANL management recently submitted to the NNSA Field Office an updated status on actions to address a report developed by the Plutonium Facility Seismic Expert Panel (see 8/14/15 weekly). LANL identified that actions are being taken to address both required and prudent actions identified by the Seismic Expert Panel. Additionally, LANL noted that the plan to address actions directed by the NNSA Field Office was not submitted by November 5, 2015 as requested, but will rather be submitted with the annual Plutonium Facility Project Execution Strategy no later than December 24, 2015.

Emergency Management: Earlier this month, the NNSA Field Office issued their review of LANL’s self-assessment of the Emergency Management Program. Rather than conduct independent federal assessments, the Field Office partnered with LANL assessors to shadow selected program element reviews believing that this approach benefits both sides and ensures timely feedback. The Field Office noted the positive practice that LANL continues to evaluate all 15-program elements utilizing the DOE evaluation guidance. Overall, the Field Office found that nearly all of the assessments were thorough, objective, and effective in identifying deficiencies. Notably, the Field Office indicated that the review of Training and Drills was excellent and very self-critical. That review concluded, “A sustainable, comprehensive, and coordinated training and drills program has not been fully implemented as required per DOE Order 151.1C.”

Plutonium Facility–Criticality Safety: On Wednesday, LANL management requested an extension of the Evaluation of the Safety of the Situation /Justification for Continued Operations (ESS/JCO) covering unclear criticality safety evaluations for two vault rooms within the facility. The ESS/JCO, which originated in 2012 and was previously extended twice, currently expires on January 9, 2016, or when a compliant evaluation is completed and implemented, whichever occurs first. LANL requested an extension to June 30, 2016, in order to facilitate continued priority on restart activities.