

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

October 5, 2018

MEMORANDUM FOR: Christopher J. Roscetti, Technical Director
FROM: J.W. Plaue and D. Gutowski, Resident Inspectors
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Activity Report for Week Ending October 5, 2018

Area G–Readiness: On Thursday, N3B personnel successfully restarted mobile loading operations with a shipment of 21 transuranic waste containers to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). They received EM Field Office approval for restart on Tuesday after completing a federal readiness review and addressing the findings. The federal review team identified a pre-start finding regarding the use of hands and feet to guide suspended loads. The team also identified post-start findings associated with the need to conduct drills for the full range of potential abnormal scenarios and the need to develop a qualified program to perform inspections of forklift attachments. Of note, N3B had planned on a larger shipment, but one of the shipping containers they received from WIPP had an expired certification.

Emergency Management: Last Thursday, federal and contractor personnel convened an emergency communications working group to characterize and address challenges with cell phone and radio coverage identified during exercises. In particular, during this year’s full-scale exercise emergency management personnel noted spotty to non-existent coverage at the Weapons Engineering Tritium Facility, as well as a nearby fire station and the emergency operations center (see 6/29/2018 report). They previously noted similar issues going back to at least 2011. The group agreed to conduct a communications assessment on a prioritized listing of defense nuclear facilities and other key facilities. Of note, the group includes EM Field Office and N3B personnel. This is particularly relevant since communications at Area G are currently heavily dependent on cell phone and radios.

Plutonium Facility–Conduct of Operations: On Monday, one of the programmatic divisions paused work in order to review conduct of operations fundamentals with the workforce as a corrective action from the recent overmass (see 9/28/2018 report). The presentations emphasized technical expertise, questioning attitude, precise communications, and the need to stop and brief when changes occur to planned work.

Plutonium Facility–Safety Basis: Safety Basis personnel entered the New Information process to evaluate whether a discrepant as found condition constitutes a Potential Inadequacy of the Safety Analysis. The concern is two argon drying furnaces in the facility’s basement that are not described in the Documented Safety Analysis.

Operations Assessment: On Monday, LANL management chartered an assessment team to examine the circumstances surrounding a violent reaction that destroyed a beaker and injured a worker with lacerations to the neck and hands. The reaction occurred during a synthetic chemistry activity at TA-35 on September 14, 2018. Of note for the defense nuclear facilities, the scope of the assessment is to include operational discipline, work authorization and control, and emergency management. They expect to complete their report by October 23, 2018.