

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

November 29, 2019

MEMORANDUM FOR: Christopher J. Roscetti, Technical Director
FROM: J.W. Plaue and D. Gutowski, Resident Inspectors
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Activity Report for Week Ending November 29, 2019

N3B–Organizational Learning: On Saturday, N3B senior management paused all work following three concerning events that occurred last week. They held a series of all hands meetings for the workforce on Monday to go over the events, their safety implications, and the importance of disciplined operations. The first event occurred last Tuesday when a subcontractor sent soil samples from TA-21 with improper markings and paperwork due to a calculation error regarding the amount of radioactivity in the samples. This error was discovered when the samples arrived at the Sample Management Office. The second, and most significant, event occurred at a groundwater sampling well. The crew was having trouble keeping a pump running so they bypassed an interlock that kept the 480 volt control panel shut while it was energized in order to reset the pump. The crew then opened the energized panel repeatedly throughout the shift to reset the pump. The final event involved potentially contaminated personnel at Area G. A worker brushed up against equipment and opted to do precautionary contamination monitoring. The monitor detected contamination resulting in a shelter-in-place at Area G. Later analysis discovered that the contamination was naturally occurring radon. For this event, management emphasized the positive questioning attitude of precautionary monitoring, but also noted that there were other changing conditions in the job area that warranted questions. No workers were injured or hazardous materials released in any of these events. The all hands meetings emphasized the importance of stop and pause work authority, pausing and questioning when conditions change, and the integrated safety management system for planning and executing work. Several workers at one meeting expressed concern with the recent change to exit monitoring requirements at Area G (see 9/20/2019 report). Area G management resumed limited activities on Tuesday. Electrical work currently requires senior management approval for release.

Environmental Management Field Office: As of last month, the EM Field Office's four authorized positions for facility representatives are unfilled. The current field oversight staffing has dropped to one technical assistance contractor performing functions similar to a facility representative. Previously there was one federal facility representative supported by two technical assistance contractors. While the office works to hire and qualify additional facility representatives, oversight is being prioritized to operations in Area G.

Performance Management: The NNSA Field Office's performance evaluation and measurement plan for Triad provides a framework including goals, objectives, and key outcomes. This fiscal year, each of the four programmatic goals includes a key outcome to execute the programs safely, securely, and compliantly with an emphasis on conduct of operations and waste management during program execution. The mission enablement and leadership goals also include key outcomes focused on: executing the transuranic waste management system to support off-site shipments; implementing actions to drive cultural change, including subcontractors; and implementing performance indicators associated with conduct of operations, criticality safety, safety basis, emergency management, and work planning and control.

The EM Field Office continues to develop their fiscal year 2020 performance plan for N3B. This plan is important to establish certainty regarding safety-related objectives; however, timely approval has been challenging due to a number of factors. For example, last year's plan was officially signed in February 2019 (see 3/8/2019 report).