

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

July 31, 2020

MEMORANDUM FOR: Christopher J. Roscetti, Technical Director
FROM: J.W. Plaue and D. Gutowski, Resident Inspectors
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Activity Report for Week Ending July 31, 2020

N3B—Organizational Learning: Last Thursday, N3B senior management paused activities at Area G and then held a company-wide stand down. The instigating events at Area G included: a work package did not include beryllium controls, a vegetation cutback crew damaged an out of service communications line, and a shipment of low-level waste arrived at an offsite disposal facility with a container tipped over. Management had also noted a trend of events in transuranic waste operations since the end of June. Following briefings to the workforce, N3B management lifted the pause with the exception of low-level offsite waste shipments.

Flanged Tritium Waste Containers: Earlier this month, Triad personnel completed their management self-assessment of planned venting operations at Area G and subsequent transport to the Weapons Engineering Tritium Facility (WETF). The assessment overcame an interruption and challenges associated with COVID-19 related controls. Of note, they took advantage of video footage, including from an unmanned aerial system, to provide assessors with observations of the demonstrated activities. WETF personnel are working through corrective actions and plan to commence the contractor readiness assessment in mid-August. Triad personnel are working through logistics to bring in members of the assessment team from out-of-state locations, since requirements for self-quarantine differ between NNSA and EM operations at the laboratory.

Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Building—Safety Basis: On Friday, Triad submitted to the NNSA Field Office the evaluation of the safety of the situation for the anomalous hydrogen levels in 9979 containers (see 6/19/2020 report). Triad personnel vented the container that was approaching the lower flammability limit at the end of June as the sole operational restriction. The proposed compensatory measures did not add any formal controls. Rather, they will add gas sampling and venting of 9979 containers to existing processes. The NNSA Field Office is reviewing the submittal.

Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Building—Risk Reduction: On Tuesday, the resident inspectors walked down the facility with Triad personnel to observe progress on activities to support future decontamination and demolition activities (see 11/8/2019 report). The initial phase of material removal is complete with approximately 100,000 pounds of low-level waste removed. Electrical disconnects in inactive wings are in progress. Triad has awarded the subcontract for more invasive equipment removal and work planning is in progress. Triad has also begun emphasizing the need for chemistry personnel to smartly ramp down operations in the coming years (e.g., perform wipes downs, complete characterization swipes, and document knowledge transfer).

Emergency Management: On Thursday morning, a 3.7 magnitude earthquake occurred approximately 50 km northwest of the laboratory. Several locations on site, including the Emergency Operations Center, reported minor shaking. There was no damage.