

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

March 3, 2023

TO: Christopher J. Roscetti, Technical Director
FROM: A. Boussouf and D. Gutowski, Resident Inspectors
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Activity Report for the Week Ending March 3, 2023

Weapons Engineering Tritium Facility (WETF)–Readiness: The contractor readiness assessment team evaluating plutonium coupon study operations completed its review and briefed its initial results to facility management on Monday (see 2/17/2023 report). The team presented six pre-start findings. These included two related to emergency preparedness that identified issues with the operational drill program as well as with abnormal operating and alarm response procedures. A federal readiness assessment is planned prior to introducing plutonium to WETF.

Plutonium Facility–Transuranic Waste Management: Last month, transuranic waste management personnel identified that, in December, workers added absorbent to a waste drum without acceptable knowledge personnel present as required by the procedure for characterization and absorption of liquids. The drum went through the visual inspection and visual examination processes in January. Acceptable knowledge specialists discovered the error when they noticed they were missing data on the amount of absorbent added to the drum. Personnel involved in the event have several corrective actions planned to prevent recurrence and ensure drums are prepared properly for disposal at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). These include assuring drums meets all WIPP Waste Acceptance Criteria, performing a major rewrite of the procedure for absorbing liquids including adding training and placekeeping requirements, and conducting training for both operations personnel and acceptable knowledge personnel.

Plutonium Facility–Criticality Safety: Vault activities are still impacted by the recently identified criticality safety concerns (see 2/17/2023 report). Three operational restrictions were eased this week. First, overpacking of non-fissionable materials is now allowed on the floor or on a transport cart. Second, overpacking of low mass fissionable containers and oxides are now authorized on a transport cart. Third, non-standard containers containing no fissionable material may be placed on the floor to support operations. All other restrictions on container placement remain in place.

Conduct of Operations: The Associate Laboratory Directorate for Weapons Production issued a new procedure for conducting fact-finding meetings to supplement the laboratory-wide institutional procedures on performance improvement and issues management. The new procedure includes a recommended timeline for holding fact-finding meetings more expeditiously after events.

Federal Oversight: On Tuesday, an NNSA Facility Representative for the Plutonium Facility completed final qualifications following a walkdown of the facility with the NNSA Field Office Manager. This brings the number of fully qualified Facility Representatives assigned full-time to the Plutonium Facility up to two. The Field Office has a large class of facility representative candidates in training who will be assigned to facilities as their training progresses.