

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

June 16, 2023

TO: Katherine R. Herrera, Acting Technical Director
FROM: A. Boussouf and D. Gutowski, Resident Inspectors
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Activity Report for the Week Ending June 16, 2023

Transuranic Waste Facility (TWF): Last Thursday, TWF personnel discovered a missed Technical Safety Requirement (TSR) surveillance and entered the appropriate limiting condition for operation (LCO). Facility personnel were receiving drums containing sealed sources from Technical Area 55. Prior to receipt of drums in the shipping and receiving area, workers need to perform several TSR surveillances as described in the use-every-time attachment to a reference-use procedure for receipt. They did not perform the surveillance that verifies compliance with sealed source material-at-risk limits due to confusion with the receipt task description in the waste management tracking software. When the error was discovered, workers paused the activity, and entered the LCO. They performed the surveillance successfully a few hours later and exited the LCO. Initial corrective actions to prevent recurrence include modifying how the waste management software addresses receipts to reduce the chance of errors performing the surveillance using data from that database, and evaluating changes to procedures and forms used during receipts.

Plutonium Facility–Criticality Safety: Two weeks ago, workers in a laboratory room identified metal turnings of unknown provenance in a container labeled empty. They paused and reported the discovery per process. The amount of material-at-risk in the glovebox was still below criticality safety limits. A fact finding was later held to discuss the incident.

Area G: Environmental Management Field Office personnel paused retrieval of corrugated metal pipes (CMP) again. Upon questioning whether all workers had current training for silica hazards, it was discovered that not all of the radiological control technicians supporting the excavation activity had said training. The personnel are in respirators to protect from radiological hazards in the excavation, which will also protect against silica. N3B and Field Office personnel are working to lift the stop work and resume excavation. To date, N3B personnel have retrieved a total of four CMPs, one last September, and three following resumption this spring.

N3B and Central Characterization Project personnel completed mobile loading of two trailers of transuranic waste containers for shipment to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant. Some of these containers did not meet the requirements for indoor shipping through RANT and required mobile loading. This infrequent activity was last performed at Area G in August 2022 (see 8/5/2022 report).

Sigma Facility: Last Thursday, a fire occurred while moving a metal component within a radiological area. The following week, facility personnel held a fact-finding meeting to discuss the incident. Meeting participants observed sparking near an acetone-soaked cloth used for cleaning, followed by ignition of the cloth. The workers immediately stepped away from the flaming cloth. One worker left to search for an extinguishing agent, while another worker extinguished the flames with a nearby cleaning agent. Facility personnel evacuated the facility and made notifications in accordance with approved procedures. Work in the area was paused pending a review of controls to mitigate similar hazards.