

**Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board Public Meeting on  
Safety Culture at the Pantex Plant**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB or “Board”), I am pleased to have this opportunity to discuss the Office of Health, Safety and Security (HSS)’s recent review of safety culture at the Pantex Plant. I want to thank the Board for encouraging HSS to include Pantex in our extent of condition reviews of safety culture.

But first, I would like to briefly comment on the status of the safety culture in the Department. As the Secretary and Deputy Secretary affirmed in their memorandum on nuclear safety and reflected in our policy DOE is committed to a strong and sustained safety culture, where all employees – from workers building and maintaining the infrastructure of our facilities to their managers, all the way up to the Secretary and everyone in between – are energetically pursuing the safe performance of work, encouraging a questioning work environment, and making sure that executing the mission safely is not just a policy statement but a value shared by all. No contractor or Federal employees should ever feel unable or unwelcome to raise safety issues.

As you know, HSS recently completed a series of assessments of safety culture including those at the Hanford Site Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant, Los Alamos National Laboratory Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Project, Y-12 National Security Site Uranium Processing Facility Project, Idaho Site Integrated Waste Management Facility, Pantex Plant, Office of Environmental Management Headquarters, and Savannah River Site Salt Waste Processing Facility. We have learned much from these safety culture assessments and we now have a better understanding of how much work remains to establish a healthy safety culture. In essence, we are at the very beginning of a long journey. We view the recent initiatives, such as the Safety Conscious Work Environment (SCWE) training underway, as important but initial steps on this journey.

**ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY**

The HSS assessments, including the one performed at the Pantex Plant, addressed three essential elements for performing a valid evaluation of the safety culture at a site or organizational element. First we ensured our evaluation teams had the appropriate expertise, including individuals with organizational behavior expertise and significant experience in the conduct of

safety culture assessments. Second, we ensured our teams used validated methods that have been proven effective over many years of implementation. Third and last, we used five complimentary methods to collect data, which enabled our teams to converge on valid results. One of the methods was a functional analysis of the organization and processes to determine how the organization describes itself. Two other methods – organizational and safety culture surveys and Behavior Anchored Rating Scales (BARS) –were administered to provide quantitative data. Interviews and focus groups were used to collect perceptions from both managers and workers. Last, observations of activities provided a direct means to observe organizational behaviors. The methodology aligns with that used by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

## **PANTEX SPECIFIC RESULTS**

We applied the five validated methods to assess the safety culture at the Pantex Plant, during June and July, 2012. We briefed the results to Pantex Plant management on August 27 and staff on August 28 including positive observations, areas for improvements, and a number of specific recommendations. The full report is available on the HSS website and I will very briefly summarize the key results.

On the positive note, the success and strength of the Pantex Plant lies in the employees' individual patriotic commitment to the mission. Employees understand the importance of the mission, want to do the best job they can, and will do whatever they can to seek approval of the customer for their efforts. In addition, the Pantex Plant has devoted significant efforts to formalizing the processes for executing work at the Pantex Plant. Processes such as pre-job briefings, change control procedures and peer checking are implemented on a routine basis. In many situations, such as verbatim compliance with production procedures, employees understood that the rigorous processes are necessary. In some cases, however, for example the hazardous energy control process, these efforts are perceived as excessive.

Several areas need improvement and increased management attention. Four of the most important are as follows.

First, efforts to communicate and implement the principles of a High Reliability Organization (HRO) have been ongoing for several years. However, HRO principles have not been internalized by the organization as demonstrated by the lack of effective communication processes, the absence of a learning organization, and the tendency to provide short term solutions to problems rather than considering their impact on the long term goals of the organization.

Second, the belief that the organization places a priority on safety is undermined by employee observations of poor facility conditions, lack of focus on meeting personal needs and a sense of cronyism. While the employee population is committed to the mission of the organization, there is a strong perception that the organization is not equally committed to the employees. This situation creates a negative effect on employee morale and commitment to the organization and

has created the perception among many employees that the financial bottom line is the only focus that matters.

Third, there is a strong perception that retaliation exists for “rocking the boat.” The consequences may be subtle such as risk of losing qualifications, punishing a group for the actions of an individual or increasing workload but they may also include being transferred out of a position or job or termination of employment. The perception has created an environment where the raising of questions or identification of problems is not the consistently accepted way of doing business.

Fourth, the Pantex Plant has not been successful in understanding the organizational and programmatic behaviors that are necessary for a healthy safety culture. The plant is managed with a very strong focus on creating processes and looking at individual and local behavior around those processes. Consequently, organizational barriers have been created that will prevent successful implementation of the initiatives needed to enhance safe and reliable performance. The barriers are evident in the differences obtained in the values and perceptions between organizational work groups but more significantly between senior management and most of the rest of the organization. The barriers are also evident in the lack of respect, difficulty in effective communication, the non-alignment between the perceptions around the unions and management relationships, and the perception that the principle of “need to know” being extended unnecessarily to cover almost every aspect of work.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the results of the HSS assessments have helped inform us about the status and will serve to guide us as we undertake this journey. At the Pantex Plant, the views and perceptions of the organization highlight the need for a sense of urgency in efforts to extend our focus and attention beyond the traditional work processes and to pay more attention to the many interactions that take place between individuals, the organization, and work environment. On a positive note, the processes that have been put in place, coupled with the motivated and committed staff, provides a strong basis from which improvements to the safety culture can be accomplished.

I will wrap up my remarks by reiterating that the Department is at the beginning of a journey towards a healthy safety culture. HSS has a number of actions underway to support the Department’s journey including:

- HSS internal improvements based on a self assessment of organizational culture
- Continuing SCWE training for both managers and staff
- Overseeing line organization self-assessments of SCWE.

Thank you for the opportunity to brief you today. I am prepared to answer any questions you may have.