

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

MEMO TO: J. Kent Fortenberry, Technical Director
FROM: Timothy Hunt, Dave Kupferer, and Rory Rauch, Pantex Site Representatives
DATE: 25 January 2008
SUBJECT: Pantex Plant Weekly Report

Combustible Control Violation: Combustibles were left unattended and a combustible storage cabinet was left open in a nuclear explosive bay with a thermally sensitive component within the prescribed standoff distance. This resulted in a technical safety requirement violation of a fire protection program administrative control. Production technicians discovered the logbook and an open combustible storage cabinet within 6.5 feet of a thermally sensitive component when they entered the facility to start the day shift. The cabinet was left open either at the end of the previous day shift or after preventive maintenance activities performed during the swing shift that evening. Maintenance personnel are directed to leave the nuclear explosive facility in the condition it is found, so the maintenance personnel would not have been expected to resolve the situation if the cabinet was open when they entered the facility.

Damaged Weapon Component: During a W87 disassembly operation, production technicians heard an unusual noise and experienced difficulty removing a component. The technicians immediately suspended work pending an evaluation. It was subsequently discovered that a cable that had been disconnected earlier in the process became reengaged and damage occurred to the connector. Process changes are under consideration to facilitate verification that the cables are completely separated from the connectors prior to further disassembly.

Safety Class System Degradation: During a deluge system full flow test in a bay, one nozzle was found to be obstructed with pipe scale and debris. The system had previously been flushed in 2002. The nozzle was cleaned, reinstalled and successfully retested. B&W Pantex engineering is considering replacing all deluge spray nozzles with open heads that have a larger effective opening. Hydraulic calculations need to be performed to ensure the water supply system can support the increased flow.

Nuclear Explosive Safety (NES) Staffing: As previously reported, B&W Pantex—with only one full time certified NES group member—has been unable to meet recent NES evaluation staffing demands. Last week, B&W Pantex generated a plan to alleviate this issue. For the next several months, B&W Pantex will restore its capability to support concurrent NES evaluations by contracting with a previously certified, recently retired, NES group member. In addition, B&W Pantex identified three engineers for expedited certification and expects two of these engineers to be certified within the year and the third to be certified within four years. B&W Pantex will continue to search in-house for additional candidates for certification and will explore the possibility of hiring a certified NES group member from elsewhere in the complex.

Trainer Unit Upgrades: B&W Pantex recently issued W78 and W87 trainer upgrade plans that support performance objectives to incorporate high quality trainer units into weapon training programs in FY08. The units will be used by the production technicians to prepare for operations on war reserve units. The trainer units are to be upgraded to a high quality status—defined as meeting requirements of the respective specification drawings—by the end of September.