

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

MEMO TO: J. Kent Fortenberry, Technical Director
FROM: Timothy Hunt and Dave Kupferer, Pantex Site Representatives
DATE: 15 December 2006
SUBJECT: Pantex Plant Weekly Report

Special Nuclear Material Component Requalification Facility (SNMCRF) Contractor Operational Readiness Review (CORR): This week, BWXT concluded its CORR to verify that line management is ready to safely proceed with the startup of SNMCRF operations. There were 22 team members on the CORR review team, and the review appears to have been very thorough. The review team identified 27 pre-start findings, 7 post-start findings, and 16 observations. The pre-start findings included deficiencies in the areas of emergency management, equipment operability, procedure quality, engineering analysis support documentation, maintenance and calibration, technical safety requirement implementation, industrial hazard identification, waste handling, training, and software quality.

W88 Cell Operations: One week ago, during W88 disassembly and inspection operations in a nuclear explosive cell, production technicians discovered that two components had unexpectedly separated. Line management appropriately notified engineering, authorization basis, nuclear explosive safety, and design agency personnel to evaluate the situation. Eight representatives of Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) traveled to Pantex to be involved in deliberations regarding BWXT's path forward. BWXT has several concerns regarding the configuration of the unit including the following: (a) a vacuum fixture, which is not currently being used but will be used later in the process, will not function as intended; (b) increased time in the current configuration increases the probability that residual stresses from the assembly process could cause additional components to separate in an undesired location; and (c) it is unknown if component aging issues contributed to the current situation. BWXT developed a two phase recovery plan. First, BWXT adjusted the unit into a safer configuration. To accomplish this task, BWXT generated a recovery procedure and associated hazard analysis, LANL provided weapons response on the proposed actions, and PXSO approved the modified compensatory measures. Second, BWXT plans to exercise a process very similar to the approved process with minor tooling modifications and safety enhancements. To accomplish this second task, BWXT is planning the following actions: requesting additional weapons response from LANL, requesting a nuclear explosive safety change evaluation (NCE), and submitting a justification for continued operation to PXSO for approval. BWXT is hoping to complete W88 recovery operations in January.

BWXT-Pantex Response to the Recent Anonymous Letter: On 7 November, a letter was sent to the President of BWXT from an anonymous group of Pantex employees. The letter described specific concerns that employees had regarding the safety of operations at Pantex. BWXT recently completed an internal investigation into the veracity of the assertions made in the letter. The investigative team concluded that, in general, the facts collected do not support the claims in the letter. However, BWXT acknowledges that the anonymous letter does point to areas where BWXT can improve, including the following: communications between management and employees, management of employee overtime, processes for employees to express minority opinions, and training of supervisors. BWXT also noted that NNSA recently completed its FY06 Performance Evaluation Report and gave BWXT-Pantex its highest award score since BWXT took over the Pantex contract.