

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

October 22, 2004

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. Kent Fortenberry, Technical Director
FROM: T. D. Burns Jr. and C. H. Keilers, Jr.
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Report for Week Ending October 22, 2004

R. Kasdorf was on-site this week augmenting site rep coverage of resumption activities.

Resumption Status: The LANL Director has approved resuming 56 % of the moderate and higher risk activity groups (i.e., 20 of 24 moderate risk; 4 of 19 higher risk; 24 of 43 overall). LANL is mid-way through reviewing and resuming nuclear operations. The Weapons Engineering Tritium Facility (WETF) has been approved to resume but still needs to resolve Operational Readiness Review (ORR) pre-starting findings from last Spring before starting up some activities. Certain TA-50/54 waste operations and the Los Alamos Neutron Science Center (LANSCE) were categorized as moderate risk and have also been approved to resume. The laboratory readiness reviews (LRR) for TA-55/CMR programs and infrastructure have completed field work. Reports should be completed next week. Two other LRRs began this week, covering TA-55 Pu-238 operations and TA-18 critical experiments and security category I/II operations. The Resumption Review Board (RRB) has accepted the management self-assessment (MSA) report for the TA-8 radiography facility, and its LRR should also begin soon. The RRB is reviewing MSA reports for both the site services contractor and TA-50/54 higher-risk waste operations. On-site transportation is still in the MSA phase.

Essential Activities: When the LANL Director suspended operations on July 16th, certain operations were deemed essential (i.e., Level-0) and were allowed to continue. The list of essential operations has been under change control since then. The LANL Resumption Plan requires that these activities be risk-categorized and reviewed in accordance with the plan. Because of programmatic pressure, LANL organizations are increasingly proposing certain activities be categorized as essential so that they can begin these activities before the resumption review and approval process is finished.

Two instances have occurred recently that may indicate less than adequate control of essential activities. In one case, an activity in a nuclear facility was deemed essential; however, the follow-on MSA identified pre-start findings – indicating a condition exists that is inconsistent with safe and secure operation. In the second case, a nuclear facility was preparing to recommend an activity as essential with the errant understanding that this designation would remove the activity from the scope of the on-going LRR. NNSA and LANL are increasing scrutiny of essential activities and have re-emphasized that no activity can proceed, essential or otherwise, until pre-start findings are resolved and that essential activities are not outside the scope of the resumption review process.

Issue Management: So far, the LANL resumption process has done a credible job of identifying both facility and institutional safety issues via the bottoms-up resumption review processes. However, actually realizing safety improvements from the stand-down investment will be fundamentally dependent on the laboratory's ability to manage the identified issues– i.e., systematically analyze the issues to develop achievable and effective corrective actions, prioritize these corrective actions in an integrated manner with other laboratory imperatives, and formally track the corrective actions to closure. Unfortunately, the laboratory's issue management processes remain ill-defined and incapable of substantively influencing institutional priorities. Expedited improvements appear warranted.