

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

March 29, 2002

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. Kent Fortenberry, Technical Director
FROM: C. H. Keilers, Jr.
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Report for Week Ending March 29, 2002

Von Holle and Martin were on site this week attending the Enhanced Surveillance Campaign 2002 Review. They also met with LANL personnel to discuss the W78 disassembly process at Pantex.

DOE Independent Oversight Review: The DOE Office of Independent Oversight and Performance Assurance (DOE-OA) completed their on-site review this week. The inspection team mentioned numerous findings, both positive and negative, during daily management briefs. From these discussions, the site rep believes that some of the more significant improvements needed are in the areas of DOE and LANL issue management and formality of self-assessments, DOE local subject matter expert staffing, LANL work control via work packages and operating procedures, DOE and LANL emergency management training, and timeliness for emergency management decisions.

In the area of vital safety systems, the team complemented the Chemistry and Metallurgical Research (CMR) Facility on improved configuration management but considered that more work is needed on the maintenance backlog, fire suppression analysis (e.g., water-hammer in external supply), and use of system engineers. The inspection team will return to validate findings the week of April 8th.

Recommendation 2000-2: The first DOE-LANL Phase II assessment begins next week (site rep weekly 12/7/01). It will cover the LANL institutional maintenance program and last about one month. The site-wide fire protection review starts the following week, and that will be followed by Phase II assessments for the Plutonium Facility (TA-55) fire alarm system, and the Radiochemistry Laboratory (TA-48) fire suppression system and confinement ventilation.

At this point, the maintenance review is the only one that appears to have a specific assessment plan developed. It will focus, at least initially, on TA-18 and CMR. The latter was just reviewed by DOE-OA during the last two weeks. The site rep believes that this team will bring a different perspective and perhaps more detailed knowledge of LANL maintenance practices and facilities. That said, it appears that DOE and LANL could improve coordination of these types of reviews.

Critical Experiments Facility (TA-18): On Thursday, LANL began the Planet control system modifications described last week to improve system reliability. This was screened as a negative Unreviewed Safety Question (site rep weekly 1/11/02).

Authorization Basis (AB): The DOE formal action on AB changes has sometimes led to confusion in the applicable LANL facilities. DOE needs to conduct technically thorough reviews; however, the occasional practice of identifying extensive technical issues and then approving AB changes and assigning new controls as equivalent to Technical Safety Requirements may be contributing to diffusion of the ABs, particularly if LANL does not then update the AB documentation. Several improvements may be warranted. One with immediate benefit would be for the responsible DOE organization to obtain DOE facility representative input before taking formal action.

Public Interaction: On Wednesday, the site rep briefed the Citizens Advisory Board on the role of the DNFSB and discussed the progress made to date and that still required in nuclear material stabilization under Board Recommendations 94-1 and 2000-1 (site rep weekly 10/12/01).