

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

May 3, 2002

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. Kent Fortenberry, Technical Director
FROM: C. H. Keilers, Jr.
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Report for Week Ending May 3, 2002

Laboratory Support for Pantex Operations: The site rep attended a Standing Management Team meeting at Pantex this week. The W-88 Step 2 project is expected to establish its baseline early next month (i.e., cost, schedule, scope); however, at this critical juncture, it appears to be coping with loss of key project personnel (Pantex, DOE), as well as reduced LANL support in recent weeks.

Recommendations 94-1/2000-1: The site rep understands that DOE and LANL are considering a flat out-year budget that does not support the draft stabilization schedule discussed with the staff in March (i.e., ramping up, processing most of the material between 2004 and 2008, and completing processing in 2009). Such a budget would likely extend the schedule for stabilizing legacy materials into the next decade. Without stabilization and packaging or disposition, the risks associated with these materials can only be expected to increase with time.

Applying full resources to LANL 94-1 activities would reduce longer-term costs and permit more efficient material storage, freeing up vault space (site rep weekly 3/8/02). The latter improves not only safety but also LANL's ability to support high-priority national security missions. The resources required at LANL to achieve timely stabilization appear to be an order of magnitude less than required for 94-1 activities at some other DOE sites (e.g., Savannah River Site, Hanford). DOE and LANL would likely benefit in multiple ways if 94-1 objectives were vigorously pursued.

Recommendation 2000-2: DOE and LANL have three Phase 2 assessments that are either underway or with completed field work: two fire protection assessments and an institutional maintenance assessment. Collectively, these Phase 2 review teams have or will assess the Plutonium Facility (TA-55), Radiochemistry Laboratory (TA-48), Chemistry and Metallurgical Research (CMR) Building, and Critical Experiments Facility (TA-18). Except for TA-18, facility walk-downs are complete.

No reports are issued yet; however, these assessments have identified issues with inspection, testing, and maintenance of fire protection systems at both the facility and institutional level, particularly with the frequencies and data records for these activities. Complicating matters is that, between 1998 and 2000, LANL proposed and DOE approved equivalencies to the applicable codes (NFPA-25, NFPA-72) that reduced many inspection, test, and maintenance frequencies. Some of the issues now being raised may impact previous assumptions that formed the bases for reducing the frequencies.

Based on preliminary oral feedback from these assessments, LANL began last week facility-specific evaluation of the issues. This is proactive. Also, the DOE Site Office this week directed LANL to take corrective actions such as developing an NFPA-25 assessment program for nuclear facilities, reporting periodically the mean-time-to-repair for fire protection system impairments, and expediting development of a plan to implement a comprehensive maintenance history program.

NMED Cleanup Order: On Wednesday, the New Mexico Environmental Department (NMED) issued a draft order to DOE and LANL, containing environmental investigation, cleanup, and reporting requirements, and a compliance schedule (CY02 - CY11). NMED expects to issue the final order following a 60-day public comment period.