

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

August 9, 2002

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. Kent Fortenberry, Technical Director
FROM: C. H. Keilers, Jr.
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Report for Week Ending August 9, 2002

Authorization Basis (AB): DOE and LANL are updating numerous ABs this year; however, plans for verifying their implementation appear highly preliminary and not resource-loaded. Particularly on the DOE side, the site rep believes that increased coordination and rigor are warranted.

Facility Operations and Maintenance: On Thursday, LANL announced that a team led by Kellogg Brown and Root Inc. will replace Johnson Controls Northern New Mexico (JCNNM) as the site services contractor. Others on the team are Shaw Infrastructure Inc. and Los Alamos Technical Associates Inc. Transition begins October 1st. The contract is for 5 years and valued at \$145M/yr.

Plutonium Facility (TA-55): TA-55 violated a Technical Safety Requirement (TSR) on Thursday when the facility took one building exhaust fan out of service for maintenance and did not verify operability of its complementary fan and plenum within one hour. Operability was confirmed within about 4 hours. DOE and LANL are pursuing why this occurred.

DOE and LANL have slipped the final readiness assessment for the new Pu-238 scrap recovery line to allow time to address issues raised in a Board letter (4/23/02). LANL has told the site rep that they are considering engineered solutions in place of administrative controls and that they will declare readiness only after senior management is satisfied with how these issues are addressed.

Radiochemistry Laboratory (TA-48): The current TA-48 authorization basis for perchlorate operations consists of a DOE approval letter (2/01), a Justification for Continued Operation (JCO), and a hazard control plan (HCP). The DOE approval letter included specific requirements, as TSR-level, for 10 minute washdowns of the glove box fume hood and the ventilation ducts after fuming operations. The HCP requires weekly ventilation duct washdowns of "about 10 minutes," regardless of whether fuming operations were done that week or not.

DOE and LANL have been investigating this week to determine whether all of these requirements have been met, particularly whether washdowns of 10 minute duration are being done after fuming operations. LANL documentation to show compliance is poor. At this time, it appears possible that a repeated violation of a TSR-level requirement in the DOE approval letter may have occurred.

Critical Experiments Facility (TA-18): TA-18 is making progress on reducing the excess material inventory (site rep weeklies 3/8/02, 5/10/02). The facility recently shipped several special nuclear material (SNM) items to TA-55 and most of the Omega West reactor fuel inventory to Oakridge. Eight fuel rods remain and are expected to be repackaged and shipped by the end of August.

Next week, LANL will also likely start shipping excess uranium solutions (SHEBA fuel) to the Chemistry and Metallurgical Research Building (CMR), one bottle at a time. At CMR, the solutions will be converted to uranyl salt and then shipped back to TA-18 for storage and potential future use. The solutions are now stored in about two dozen plastic bottles offering limited protection. They will be transferred to new bottles and shipped in 6M containers for safety reasons. TA-18 is also working with CMR to develop a path-forward to address about 30 poorly characterized drums of uranium.