

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

March 22, 2002

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. K. Fortenberry, Technical Director
FROM: H. Waugh and W. White, Pantex Site Representatives
SUBJECT: Pantex Plant Activity Report for Week Ending March 22, 2002

DNFSB Activity Summary: H. Waugh was on site all week. W. White was on site Monday and Tuesday and was on leave for the remainder of the week. D. Nichols was on site all week to attend USQ training and review BWXT USQ files.

Fire Protection Basis for Interim Operation (FBIO): BWXT is implementing the controls from the FBIO in a phased approach. According to BWXT and ASO personnel, the first phase of control implementation has been completed. Seven site-wide administrative controls are in place; readiness assessments for these controls, conducted by both ASO and BWXT, found the controls to be adequately implemented. One of the seven controls is for fire protection engineering to periodically walk down nuclear facilities to ensure adequate compliance with the combustible material controls. It is not clear, however, that the checklist used by fire protection personnel during this walk down provides adequate direction to ensure compliance with the technical safety requirement. [II.A]

Separations Test Facility Contractor Operational Readiness Review (CORR): BWXT began its CORR for restart of the separations test facility last week. The CORR was suspended soon after it began as a result of problems with the operating procedures. The readiness verification completed by line management prior to declaring readiness had no observations and no findings. The readiness verification conducted much of its procedure review by table top and did not observe demonstrations of all of the procedures. This failure by line management to verify readiness adequately prior to initiating the independent readiness review process continues a trend of failures over the past few years.

A corrective action plan developed by BWXT after difficulties during start up of W78 operations identified significant issues with the technical assist process used at the time as the line management tool for evaluating readiness. As part of that plan, BWXT replaced the technical assist process with a readiness verification process intended to address the deficiencies identified in the W78 Readiness Assessment. Based on the suspension of the Separations Test CORR, the deficiencies in the contractor's readiness process do not appear to have been effectively addressed.

In a related development, a nuclear explosive safety study group concluded on Monday that the input documents provided to the group were not sufficient for conducting a study. Key safety analyses from the design agencies are not yet complete. The nuclear explosive safety study for the separations test facility, previously scheduled to begin next week, was postponed indefinitely. [II.A]

Sealed-Insert Container Surveillance: On March 19, 2002, a sealed insert container packaged on December 18, 2000 failed a surveillance leak test. The leak rate observed was 1.09×10^{-5} cc/sec. The initial packaging requirement is "less than 2.34×10^{-7} cc/sec." An SIER is being generated. The sealed insert was the 156th random sample in the current surveillance program, and the first failure to be reported.[II.A]