

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

April 27, 2001

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. K. Fortenberry, Technical Director
FROM: H. Waugh and W. White, Pantex Site Representatives
SUBJECT: Pantex Plant Activity Report for Week Ending April 27, 2001

DNFSB Activity Summary: H. Waugh and W. White were on site all week.

W87 Electrical Test: DOE Albuquerque Nuclear Explosive Safety personnel approved a modified request by Sandia National Laboratories and BWXT to perform additional electrical testing on the W87 unit which had failed an electrical test in January. Electrical troubleshooting on nuclear weapons is prohibited under an Albuquerque supplemental directive (452.2A). Deviations from this prohibition require evaluation by nuclear explosive safety personnel at DOE Albuquerque and the design agency. After discussions with DOE Albuquerque, Sandia agreed to limit the retesting to a single test at one range setting of the PT4030 tester. Based on this agreement, DOE Albuquerque agreed to approve the test as a minor change. Before the test is performed, a radiological survey of the gas transfer system will be required. In addition, a design agency representative will be present during the test. Slight manipulation of the connector housing will be allowed. If an out-of-range reading is obtained, the operations on the unit will be suspended again.

BWXT personnel have written a nuclear explosive engineering procedure to implement the test; however, the test is not expected to occur until Tuesday of next week. To conduct the test, the unit must be moved from the cell where it is currently staged to a bay approved for W87 operations. Once again, there seems to be no particular urgency in addressing the anomaly with this unit. [II.A]

Pit Repackaging Program: About 50 pits were repackaged for the week. For the month of April, BWXT has repackaged approximately 193 pits into sealed-insert containers. This marks a monthly record for pits repackaged at Pantex and may lead to 200 pits being repackaged for the month of April. This would reach DOE's goal of 200 pits repackaged per month as discussed in Recommendation 99-1. However, this repackaging rate was accomplished without the two line, two shift level of effort to which DOE committed in the implementation plan for Recommendation 99-1. Currently, the pit repackaging rate appears to be limited by the rate of container procurement, which is based on a 200 pit per month repackaging rate. [II.A]

No-Notice Emergency Response Organization Recall Drill: A no-notice drill to recall the emergency response organization was initiated on Thursday morning at 5:55 a.m. The radiation safety officer arrived at the operations center at 6:15 a.m., followed by the BWXT director for operations at 6:23 a.m. A full complement of personnel appeared to be present by 7:00 a.m. Off-site operations centers were also recalled, but, in some cases, personnel assigned to report to off-site locations reported instead to the Pantex operations center. At the Pantex operations center, no one was present who could set up the computer system in the executive conference room, and the operations director, after assuming command from the plant shift superintendent, was forced to indicate facts relative to the situation on a chalk board. Of note, there was no one present from the general manager's office. Overall, the drill was less than a smashing success. This was the first after-hours recall drill in recent times (the most recent previous drill was in the mid-1980's).