

## **DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD**

**MEMO TO:** Timothy Dwyer, Technical Director  
**FROM:** Matthew Duncan and Rory Rauch, Pantex Site Representatives  
**SUBJECT:** Pantex Plant Report for Week Ending February 3, 2012

**Anomalous Unit:** As reported last week, the PXSO manager approved a Nuclear Explosive Safety (NES) change evaluation (NCE) of the recovery operation for a unit with a stuck detonator cable assembly (DCA). In its memo, the NCE group presented a concern that the extent of high explosive (HE) removal that took place on the unit before operations were suspended was not bounded by the current NES authorization for this process. B&W has since addressed this concern by modifying the applicable procedure and training technicians on a DCA removal technique that is consistent with the current NES authorization. Operations restarted using the new procedure and technique (one that only allows for the removal of incidental amounts of HE) last week. Following the implementation of these changes, technicians have been unable to remove the DCA on two units. The responsible design agency (DA) plans to issue weapon response to support the development of a recovery operation, which should be nearly identical to the recovery operation for the first stuck unit, by the end of this week. In addition, NNSA performed an NCE on the proposed recovery operation for these units. The NCE group had no findings and the PXSO manager approved the NCE this week.

B&W anticipates that they will encounter more stuck units now that technicians are using a DCA removal technique that is consistent with the current NES authorization for that process. B&W and DA representatives met this week to establish a path forward for developing a process that will remove the DCA more consistently on units with excessive amounts of adhesive. In the near term, the DAs and members of the NES community plan to develop the weapon response information and perform the NES evaluations needed for B&W to transition to the recovery operation (i.e., cut the DCA and install a protective cover) without having to develop a justification for continued operations or perform an NCE for every stuck unit. In the long term, the DA plans to support the development of a safety case that will allow for the removal of additional HE around the DCA before a unit is declared stuck.

**NES Oversight:** This week, PXSO issued a memo in response to the NCE group's concern (see above entry) that the extent of HE removal on the first unit with the stuck DCA was not bounded by the current NES authorization for the process. PXSO believes this issue is evidence that the scope of operations approved by NES evaluations may not be clearly documented and understood. In light of these concerns, PXSO requested that B&W evaluate the state of the NES change control process. Further, since the independence of safety organizations such as the B&W NES Department is important to assure the safety of nuclear explosive operations, the memo requests that this evaluation include a review of the current reporting relationship and functional transparency of the NES change control process.

**Quality of Work:** This week, B&W issued its response to the PXSO memo that expressed concerns with B&W's quality of work (see 12/2/11 report). Of note, the memo addressed the PXSO manager's concern that broader issues, such as the impending contract consolidation, may be distracting from the focus on quality work performance. It noted that none of the workers involved in the issues identified in the PXSO memo reported being distracted by broader issues. However, the memo indicated that B&W may have to undergo workforce restructuring to maintain staffing at a level consistent with the anticipated fiscal year 2013 budget. Anticipating that this restructuring has the potential to affect productivity, B&W management plans to establish a comprehensive communication plan that is intended to share all releasable information that could impact jobs or organizational structure.