

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

August 22, 2014

MEMORANDUM FOR: S.A. Stokes, Technical Director
FROM: R.K. Verhaagen and J.W. Plaue
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Report for Week Ending August 22, 2014

DNFSB Staff Activity: E.M. Gibson observed geophysical testing performed in support of the update for the probabilistic seismic hazard analysis.

Field Office: The field office continues to experience difficulties maintaining adequate staffing. Currently, there are 21 federal employee vacancies. These vacancies include many key safety-related positions such as the Deputy Manager, Senior Technology Safety Advisor, Deputy Assistant Manager for Operations, Quality Assurance Manager, three Facility Representatives, and two capital project managers.

Plutonium Facility–Americium Recovery Project: Last week, LANL submitted to the field office a request for approval of the Plan of Action for a Contractor Readiness Assessment (CRA) to establish an americium-241 production capability in the Plutonium Facility. The chloride extraction and actinide recovery (CLEAR) line will recover americium-241 from waste streams that are newly generated or previously stored in the Plutonium Facility. One product of the CLEAR line process will be americium oxide that meets industrial customer specification requirements as directed by the DOE Office of Science. Americium oxide is used by the natural gas and crude oil well logging industry, as well as use in smoke detectors. LANL desires to commence the CRA in September 2014 pending approval of the request and successful completion of a Management Self-Assessment of readiness. Successful completion of the CRA would facilitate a Federal Readiness Assessment currently planned for November 2014.

Nuclear Environmental Sites: This week, a federalized project team successfully completed demolition of the two legacy water towers at TA-21 (see 4/25/14 weekly).

Transuranic Liquid Waste Subproject: Last week, the field office disapproved revision 3 of the Safety Design Strategy for the project. Substantive comments included the need to provide a technical basis for the volumes of liquid to be treated and to clarify the material-at-risk values.

Weapons Engineering Tritium Facility (WETF)–Restart Activities: This week, LANL submitted to the field office an implementation plan (IP) for the conduct of the CRA to restart gas transfer operations at WETF. The field office previously approved a Plan of Action for the CRA that directed LANL to submit the IP prior to the start of the assessment. The CRA team will evaluate WETF readiness to perform gas transfer operations from the function tester glovebox to the load-in glovebox. Additionally, based on the time elapsed since the last gas transfer and function test operations, these previously authorized activities will be evaluated as well. The start date of the CRA is contingent on field office approval of the recently submitted Evaluation of the Safety of the Situation for the issues associated with the Oxygen Monitoring System (see 8/15/14 weekly). The IP notes that following successful completion of the CRA and a follow-on Federal Readiness Assessment, the scope of activities to be authorized will be limited to those operations necessary to maintain facility safety/operability and to disposition legacy nuclear material at risk.