

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

TO: Steven Stokes, Technical Director
FROM: William Linzau and Rory Rauch, Site Representatives
SUBJECT: Oak Ridge Activity Report for Week Ending November 28, 2014

Operational Excellence: On October 10, 2014, CNS submitted its response to NPO's letter communicating concerns with Y-12 operational discipline (see 8/15/14 report). In the response, the CNS Chief Executive Officer agreed with NPO's call for change. CNS has developed a long-term plan for establishing a culture of operational excellence, which sees all incidents as preventable and goes beyond compliance with requirements. The plan is currently at a very high level, but lays the foundation for the desired outcome in five phases: develop a detailed understanding of work environments and previous issues, establish a vision of excellence, communicate and train at all levels, improve processes and develop metrics to drive performance excellence, and implement continuous learning and improvement.

Last week, the operational excellence plan sponsors briefed NPO senior managers on the progress made to date in executing the plan. Actions already underway include the initiation of a systems review to understand the causes of recent events, the development of a communication strategy to ensure employees receive a clear and consistent message from management regarding performance expectations, leadership development training, and the development of standards of excellence for each line organization. NPO senior managers expressed concern that the plan had not resulted in more immediate improvements in CNS operational performance. They cited the number and significance of recent events, and an observation that CNS line management had not responded to certain events with the appropriate urgency or self-critical tone.

The Feedback and Improvement Working Group (FIWG)—an organization identified in the operational excellence plan as a valuable resource for providing contractor management a critical, independent review of Y-12 performance—also provided CNS management feedback related to recent operational events in the most recent issue of the Contractor Assurance System Performance Report. The FIWG noted that the magnitude of change instituted in the last six months coupled with a significant number of experienced plant workers and supervisors retiring may have introduced unintended consequences impacting floor level performance. The FIWG also noted that the independent nuclear safety oversight function of the CNS organization is not fully functional, which may also be impacting desired improvements in operational performance.

The site reps share the concerns presented by NPO and the FIWG. The most significant recent event was a TSR violation that resulted from a series of conduct of operations breakdowns (see 11/14/14 report). One of the key breakdowns involved fire department personnel failing to execute an important step in a continuous use procedure. Other events include a worker failing to comply with a procedural requirement to verify that an instrument calibration was current prior to use, conduct of operations weaknesses resulting in the relocation of hazardous material to an unauthorized location, and workers correcting an abnormal criticality safety condition before receiving direction from the criticality safety engineer as required by procedure.

CNS management has initiated several urgent actions that appear to be responsive to NPO's feedback. Specifically, CNS plans to hold a series of meetings next week to quickly disseminate to all levels of management a series of performance expectations, such as the need to spend more time in the field observing work and actively engaging with employees. In addition, as a near-term measure to address the lack of a fully staffed independent nuclear safety oversight function, CNS has assigned a senior manager within the Mission Assurance organization to focus full time on guiding and mentoring the response to Y-12 events until the function can be fully staffed.