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DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

PUBLIC MEETING
ON THE STATUS OF THE SAVANNAH RIVER SITE

JULY 13, 2021

625 Indiana Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Public Meeting
Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board

7/13/2021

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A P P E A R A N C E S

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD:

- JOYCE L. CONNERY, Chair
- THOMAS A. SUMMERS, Vice Chair
- JESSIE H. ROBERSON, Board Member

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY:

- WILLIAM I. WHITE, Acting Assistant Secretary,
Office of Environmental Management
- GREG SOSSON, Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Safety, Security and Quality Assurance
- MICHAEL D. BUDNEY, Manager, Savannah River
Operations Office

NATIONAL NUCLEAR SECURITY ADMINISTRATION:

- CHARLES P. VERDON, Acting Under Secretary for
Nuclear Security and Administration
- JAMES McCONNELL, Associate Administrator for
Safety, Infrastructure and Operations
- JASON A. ARMSTRONG, Savannah River Field Office
Manager

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S
2 - - - - -

3 CHAIR CONNERY: Good morning. My name is Joyce
4 Connery, and I am the Chair of the Defense Nuclear
5 Facilities Safety Board. I will preside over today's
6 public meeting. With me today are my colleagues on the
7 Board: Vice Chair, Thomas Summers, and Board member
8 Jessie Roberson. We three constitute the Board.

9 Having established a quorum of Board members,
10 this meeting will now come to order. Mr. Kevin
11 Lyskowski, the Board's general counsel, will serve as
12 Executive Secretary for the meeting.

13 This meeting was publicly announced on June 24th,
14 2021, on the Board's public website, and subsequently
15 noticed in the Federal Register on July 7th, 2021. This
16 meeting is currently being broadcast live over the
17 Internet and a recording and transcript will be
18 available on our website in coming days.

19 We decided to hold this meeting of the unique
20 situation in which the Department of Energy found itself
21 since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. We wanted to
22 provide the Department with an opportunity to talk
23 through some of the challenges impacting their
24 facilities and how they have addressed those challenges,
25 and discuss plans to transition back to a more normal

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1 operating environment.

2 Our morning sessions are not focused on any
3 safety issues that the Board has identified, which is
4 why the Board decided to discuss them in a public
5 meeting rather than a hearing, which will be held this
6 afternoon.

7 I now turn to my fellow Board members for their
8 opening remarks.

9 Mr. Summers, let's start with you.

10 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Thank you, Ms. Connery.

11 I appreciate everyone's participation today and I
12 really look forward to a productive dialogue to improve
13 our mutual understanding of each other's views. I can't
14 wait.

15 Thank you again, Ms. Connery.

16 CHAIR CONNERY: Thank you, sir.

17 Ms. Roberson?

18 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, Chair Connery.

19 I just want to thank all of the participants who
20 came to contribute to the knowledge we're all going to
21 gain today and exchange. I'm looking forward to the
22 dialogue, both this morning and this afternoon, and I
23 have no further comments. Thank you.

24 CHAIR CONNERY: Thank you.

25 Now I'm going to offer my personal remarks, so

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1 not as Chairman, but as a Board member, and I'm going to
2 start off this morning's session noting what I said
3 earlier, that we are holding this meeting not because of
4 any safety deficiencies that we or our staff noticed
5 with regards to how the Department in general, or
6 Savannah River in particular, operated during the height
7 of the pandemic.

8 We wanted to have a discussion with EM and NNSA
9 about the tradeoffs they made and how they made their
10 choices and communicated them, and what lessons learned
11 that can be gleaned from this unprecedented situation.
12 Understanding how to operate in a constrained
13 environment, what innovations were made, which should be
14 carried forward and which should not be carried forward
15 when we return to an unconstrained environment. These
16 are all important discussions that we hope to have this
17 morning.

18 As I have said in other venues, we do not yet
19 know the total impact that COVID has had in our
20 workforce or on society as a whole. What we do know is
21 that we were all profoundly impacted. And I want to
22 acknowledge the men and women who work for the
23 Department and for the National Nuclear Security
24 Administration and the nuclear enterprise for
25 persevering through the difficult and uncertain times

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1 and carrying out their mission in the midst of a
2 pandemic, while worrying about their own families and
3 loved ones. On behalf of all of us, I thank you for
4 your commitment to the work that you do on behalf of the
5 American people.

6 So joining us today from the Department to
7 discuss these issues are Mr. William White, the Acting
8 Assistant Secretary of the Office of Environmental
9 Management. We also have Mr. Mike Budney, the manager
10 of the Savannah River Operations Field Office. Finally,
11 in a supporting role, we have Mr. Greg Sosson, the
12 Deputy Assistant Secretary for Safety, Security and
13 Quality Assurance.

14 I believe that they have a few words to say
15 before we start our discussion, so I give it over to
16 you, Mr. White, for your opening remarks.

17 MR. WHITE: Good morning. I appreciate the
18 opportunity to join you here this morning, Ms. Connery,
19 Mr. Summers, Ms. Roberson. It's good to see all of you
20 again. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about our
21 program at EM and some of the challenges we've had over
22 the course of the past couple of years.

23 As the acting assistant secretary for the
24 Department of Energy's Environmental Management Program,
25 I have the honor to lead EM's mission to safely and

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1 efficiently address the substantial environmental
2 liability that exists across the EM complex resulting
3 from decades of nuclear weapons production and
4 government-sponsored nuclear energy research that's
5 played a pivotal role in domestic security and
6 prosperity.

7 I really, again, appreciate the opportunity to
8 talk to you this morning, though, about the impact that
9 COVID has had on the operations of our nuclear
10 facilities. As a proactive measure to the COVID-19
11 pandemic, the Department embarked on a comprehensive
12 approach to deal with the impacts of the pandemic by
13 establishing DOE policy and guidance starting in March
14 of 2020.

15 This guidance served to establish complex
16 communications, reporting, and development and
17 implementation of response plans consistent with
18 direction we were getting from the White House and the
19 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to address
20 the pandemic.

21 As the pandemic progressed and our understanding
22 of the virus improved, EM continued action to protect
23 the workforce at our sites by allowing activities in
24 response to this understanding and the changing local
25 health conditions.

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1 In March of 2020, at the onset of the pandemic,
2 an ad hoc headquarters response team was formed in which
3 EM participated to establish protocols for the
4 Department. From its own set, the response team was
5 managed by the director of the Office of Management's
6 Office of Industrial Hygiene and Safety at headquarters.
7 By mid-March of 2020, DOE had transitioned to a maximum
8 telework status for employees following OMB guidance.
9 The Department also established COVID emergency response
10 preparedness and guidance, and despite the pandemic, the
11 EM program continued to work to ensure the safety of all
12 of our workers to safely execute essential missions and
13 to maintain an effective federal oversight posture.

14 EM required all field sites to review their
15 activities, determine which were required for the
16 maintenance of processes and systems that impacted the
17 safety of the public or on-site workers, and to ensure
18 they were complying with CDC recommendations and
19 applicable state requirements to the maximum extent
20 possible.

21 Additional activities were authorized only after
22 review for the required limitation of COVID-19 controls.
23 Outside community infection rates were also a factor in
24 whether work was allowed. Over the course of the
25 pandemic, EM has continued to rely on its dedicated

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1 front-line workforce to ensure the safety of our nuclear
2 facilities, the security of our sites, and the necessary
3 environmental monitoring and protection as needed for
4 public safety.

5 At EM headquarters, workplace safety plans were
6 reviewed and authorized by myself and the EM principal
7 deputy assistant secretary as a requirement before
8 additional work was authorized. Throughout the
9 pandemic, DOE federal oversight continued commensurate
10 with mission-essential work activities and ongoing
11 operations to ensure implementation of safety equipment
12 surveillances.

13 As CDC and OMB guidance evolved, DOE continued to
14 work to ensure effective implementation by its
15 workforce. In March of 2021, for example, EM held a
16 safety policy Webex, which provided information to all
17 EM employees across the complex on the most recent
18 guidance. Safety policy objectives would review safety
19 protocols, we invigorated adherence protocols, reviewed
20 CDC recommendations, addressed COVID fatigue issues and
21 discussed challenges associated with protocols.

22 So I appreciate the opportunity and I look
23 forward to the discussion this morning as we work
24 together to ensure the continued safe operations of our
25 DOE facilities. Thank you.

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1 CHAIR CONNERY: Thank you, Mr. White.

2 Mr. Budney, did you have opening comments as
3 well? I believe you're muted.

4 MR. BUDNEY: Good morning, Ms. Connery,
5 Mr. Summers, Ms. Roberson. Thanks very much for
6 inviting me here today to have this discussion. I don't
7 have any additional comments, other than what Mr. White
8 said, but I look forward to having a discussion about --
9 the particulars about how we reacted to the pandemic to
10 keep the public safe.

11 CHAIR CONNERY: Thank you. Thank you both for
12 your opening remarks, and with the time remaining this
13 session, the Board has some questions, and so I am going
14 to turn it over to Mr. Summers to ask the first
15 question.

16 Over to you, Mr. Summers.

17 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Mr. White and Mr. Budney.
18 Mr. White, I'll ask the first question to you. Early in
19 the pandemic, the sites identified potential challenges
20 associated with their ability to meet certain
21 requirements resulting in a 180-day relief memorandum
22 from the Secretary, which was, again -- or was later
23 extended.

24 With regard to training and qualifications, can
25 you discuss how DOE headquarters assessed the risk and

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1 safety in determining the qualifications for which to
2 provide relief in the secretarial memo? Thank you.

3 MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Summers.

4 That's sort of a good question to start off with,
5 I think, because what it does is it kind of highlights
6 over the course of the past year and a half the constant
7 work that the Department has had to do at relative risk
8 across the enterprise and thinking about how we manage
9 operations in a pandemic environment.

10 So as you all are aware, you know, our approach
11 for safety at all of our facilities is built on a lot of
12 different things from the way we do operations to the
13 controls we put in place, but also the training and
14 qualifications and the people who do work at our
15 facilities, a very important component of ensuring that
16 we have safe operations at DOE facilities.

17 As we sort of looked initially at the training
18 and qualifications that were coming up, we made a
19 conscious decision that if you think about training
20 qualification, the point of particularly for the
21 recurring requalification and retraining activities that
22 occurred, these are things that need to be done at some
23 periodicity to make sure that you maintain proficiency,
24 but if you look at relative risk associated with letting
25 them lapse a few months, or a little bit longer in some

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1 cases, I think the marginal risk associated with that is
2 quite low.

3 When we looked in comparison, when we thought
4 about how we were going to get folks involved and
5 actually do the training, particularly for some of the
6 training activities that required what I think most of
7 you have probably been through, rad worker II training
8 and other types of training like that that require you
9 to do them in a nonvirtual environment in order to
10 really be effective at the training. That training
11 itself posed what we felt was significantly more risk
12 than we would be accepting by allowing some amount of
13 deferral of the training involved.

14 Now, we did not know at the time exactly how long
15 that deferral was going to be for, so I think you see
16 that reflected in a series of memos that came out. And
17 certainly the intent has never been to allow that to go
18 on indefinitely. At some point, as soon as possible, we
19 need to really unwind that. And over the course of the,
20 you know, last year and a half, as we found ways to do
21 some of the training in a way that we felt was safe, as
22 we set up training environments that allowed for the
23 appropriate social distancing at different sites as we
24 figured out how to do that training in a way that was
25 low risk to the folks involved, then we tried to get

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1 that done right away and not simply take advantage of an
2 exception memo, but do the training that we could once
3 we felt we could do that training safely.

4 So it was a little bit of a balance at every
5 site. So when you look and go from site to site, you
6 will see a little bit of a different perspective in
7 terms of how they approached it. It depends on the type
8 of operations they have, the type of training that was
9 required, whether the site had the ability to set up the
10 training in a way that could be done safely, really
11 quickly, or whether they needed to push that off.

12 So, you know, I think in general, the Department
13 has done a pretty good job of managing that over the
14 course of the past 18 months. Certainly we have lessons
15 learned in that regard, but at the end of the day, I
16 think deferring or delaying that training for a short
17 period of time in order to ensure that we could protect
18 the folks who would have had to have been involved in
19 doing the training in person was the right thing to do.

20 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Very good. Thanks,
21 Mr. White. I really appreciate your insights.

22 MR. WHITE: Sure.

23 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Mr. Budney, the second
24 question is for you, sir, and can you please discuss how
25 the Savannah River operations office applied this

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1 memorandum that we've been discussing to any training
2 and qualifications requirements during the pandemic?
3 And if you would, please note any current training and
4 qualifications exemptions and the methods used to
5 minimize the need for them now. Thank you.

6 MR. BUDNEY: Right. So at Savannah River, we
7 were -- initially we issued or brought corrections to
8 the contractors at that level to authorize the
9 suspension of the risk qualification and certifications
10 because of reasons that Mr. White mentioned, for the
11 safety first program for the people. And then we tried
12 to figure out with the contractors exactly how we could
13 manage this.

14 And, frankly, in most instances, because within
15 several weeks we had to bring back a lot of our staff
16 because we had operating facilities and people we needed
17 to bring back, because people had been absent for a long
18 period of time. It actually enabled us to keep the vast
19 majority of our operator quals up to certification
20 standards.

21 And so we did not fall behind, in general, in
22 operator qualifications and certifications, with some
23 exception, perhaps a person's health issue or something
24 in particular to an individual preventing them from
25 getting their practical experience factors done for the

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1 training, but they were brought back in and cycled back
2 in. It did slow down temporarily, some initial training
3 in the classroom, where you have live in classrooms for
4 about a month, but we recovered for the most part.

5 The only real impact for extended qualifications
6 are in the emergency response area. We have hundreds of
7 people qualified for both site emergency response and
8 for facility emergency response. Even there, 66 percent
9 of the site emergency response personnel were able to
10 maintain their qualifications, and 82 percent
11 facilities.

12 And the letter of direction to the contractor
13 specifies that they need to expedite and certify all
14 those to some extent once it's bringing the workforce
15 back. I would have to look at that letter to see the
16 specific time limits there in which they need to be
17 certified, but it didn't have a big impact on operator
18 qualifications. We were able to maintain those
19 certifications.

20 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: I acknowledge the challenges
21 that I know you went through, and I really appreciate
22 your insights and making sure you paid attention to the
23 qualifications and training. Thanks, Mr. Budney.

24 At this time, I would like to turn over the next
25 couple of questions to my fellow Board member,

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1 Ms. Jessie Roberson.

2 Ms. Roberson?

3 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, Mr. Summers
4 and Chairman Connery, and thank you for our participants
5 this morning. Welcome.

6 Mr. Budney, I would just like to ask you a few
7 questions, since you're on the front line, really.
8 Obviously, foremost in your mind, as you've alluded to
9 before, and also in our mind is making sure that you
10 have sufficient staffing to carry out the activities
11 that are important for you to do on a routine basis.

12 So DOE establishes minimum staffing requirements
13 to make sure that it can operate safely. And as we
14 know, the pandemic introduced new worker hazards that
15 could challenge the contractors, your multiple
16 contractors, abilities to maintain those minimum
17 staffing requirements.

18 Many of these pandemic hazards and controls like
19 mask use and social distancing are being identified at
20 the federal level and evolved as knowledge and
21 experience with the virus did. Normally DOE formally
22 incorporates requirements for its contractors into
23 contracts, and then relies on contractor management
24 safety management programs to identify and address new
25 hazards.

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1 With SRS having multiple facilities under
2 different contractors, can you describe how your office,
3 your operation, oversaw consistent implementation of
4 these new pandemic controls across the site?

5 MR. BUDNEY: So one of the duties that our
6 management operations contractor has is the coordination
7 of certain activities and providing services to all the
8 contractors on site. And all our contractors sign up to
9 certain site-wide procedures and operations. Emergency
10 planning is one of those and it includes contractor
11 activities and response.

12 And so all the contractors had to adhere to the
13 emergency -- with the infectious disease response plan
14 that we had at the time, we enforced a series of
15 guidance change and workforce guidance change. We
16 amended that guidance and then promulgated rapidly to
17 all unit contractors and therefore hence the guidance
18 changed, whenever it be, you know, on June 29th we
19 implemented site-wide masks were made mandatory inside
20 all of our buildings on the site, and that was
21 promulgated to all the relevant contractors.

22 We held weekly open calls with all our
23 contractors, and all of the other tenant commands on
24 site. Everybody followed the same guidance from the
25 Forest Service, the Savannah River Ecology Lab, to the

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1 prime contractors that we have. They all followed the
2 same -- you know, all the facilities, they followed the
3 guidance.

4 The other thing we did to help us implement and
5 verify that procedures were followed, we had an
6 infectious disease response team that was stood up as
7 part of our infectious disease response plan. They
8 coordinated the drafting and approval of all those
9 procedures as we changed them. At the corporate level,
10 CDC and headquarters guidance, and they also formed a
11 team that if there was any indication that things
12 weren't -- well, first of all, for any operations,
13 changing the way they were doing business, or if we
14 detected perhaps there was a problem where our
15 infectious disease response team acted as our objective
16 standard to come out and look at those individual
17 operations and verify that the standards were being
18 implemented correctly.

19 And so that coordination by the individual
20 contractor made it pretty easy to get those standards
21 implemented.

22 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, sir.

23 So if we take that and we focus in on confined
24 spaces like in a control room where sometimes you have
25 limited space, you have a lot of personnel traffic,

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1 normally, and, you know, a requirement or demand often
2 times for face-to-face communication.

3 Can you tell us how DOE ensured proper
4 implementation of the same pandemic controls, or others,
5 in maintaining minimum staffing for controls. Were
6 there additional considerations specific to different
7 facilities or did you have additional site-wide
8 considerations specifically for confined spaces like
9 control rooms?

10 MR. BUDNEY: We implemented the CDC guidance in
11 the control rooms. We did put up some additional
12 barriers. We paid attention to the ventilation systems
13 and those areas to make sure they were properly aligned
14 so that we didn't exasperate any areas. We implemented
15 the social distancing.

16 So there wasn't a special thing for performance,
17 other than some of those additional priorities we put
18 up. Essentially it involved wearing masks, stay six
19 feet away, social distancing, per the CDC guidance.

20 And then we verified those from the highest
21 level. You know, we did a lot of management of field
22 operations and a lot of those field operations were
23 specifically directed to the COVID protocols being
24 implemented properly. I myself did my normal rate of
25 managing field operations. I got out there to see

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1 personally that the protocols were implemented properly
2 and there was nothing that I remember seeing.

3 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, sir. And I
4 guess my last question at this time is, you know, having
5 gone through what you've gone through and now looking
6 forward to where we still are in some degree that
7 transition, have you found the need for additional
8 guidance as we move more of the workforce into a state
9 of vaccination, as far as augmenting or modifying that
10 guidance during the transition? Have you identified the
11 need for any additional guidance?

12 MR. BUDNEY: You know, we're following the
13 guidance provided by headquarters. Personnel who are
14 vaccinated aren't required to wear masks or observe
15 social distancing; however, folks who are not vaccinated
16 are required to maintain social distancing. Or if they
17 do not want to identify whether they have been
18 vaccinated or not, they would have to maintain social
19 distancing and wear masks just as we had done
20 previously.

21 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, Mr. Budney.
22 Thank you, Ms. Connery.

23 CHAIR CONNERY: Thank you, Ms. Roberson.

24 So I'm going to go off -- I'm going to terrify my
25 staff and go off the script a little bit and ask a

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1 question, kind of a follow-on question to what
2 Ms. Roberson asked before I go into my next line of
3 questioning, and that is, Mr. Budney, you know, you
4 talked about following guidance that came from
5 headquarters, following CDC guidance. We know early on
6 some of the guidance was conflicting, and we had
7 anecdotal evidence that, you know, the COVID got spread
8 in some places because we didn't know what we didn't
9 know at that point in time. And so, you know, fans were
10 used or people were using the same telephone, what have
11 you.

12 How did you get feedback up to headquarters?
13 What was the conversation like between you and
14 headquarters about, hey, this is what we're seeing in
15 the field, and this is where your operational guidance
16 is, you know, not going to provide first contact with my
17 site for these reasons. Was there a good give and take
18 and how did that happen, just out of curiosity? Because
19 you have the field experience, and you're seeing these
20 things up close and personal, and delivering that
21 message back to headquarters and maybe having them
22 adjust in terms of what they're giving as guidance seems
23 to be a useful and helpful exercise.

24 So can you just talk about -- talk me through
25 about how that worked and whether or not you thought it

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1 was positive and if there were changes throughout COVID
2 that occurred and how that conversation happened.

3 MR. BUDNEY: Sure. There's a direct line of
4 communications at least through EM-3 into EM-1. You
5 know, we had a situation where we did have one remote
6 area, and this is where we found -- we generally found
7 those problems, were remote areas, hard to get to,
8 places where you couldn't just drop in unannounced,
9 there were a lot of protocols you had to go through to
10 get into the sites.

11 And I would tell you that in the cases where we
12 had where it was an on-site issue, where we would send
13 an infectious disease response team out to investigate
14 those, I will tell you that the protocols were perhaps
15 not implemented as well as we had hoped they would be.

16 We were surprised by a couple of things. You
17 mentioned the fans. And so we had to forego that,
18 because it's particularly hot and the systems are, you
19 know, during the summer here it's pretty warm out there.
20 The use of desk fans turned out to be a problem and we
21 sent the lab out to investigate that. The lessons
22 learned report cited fans attributing to the problem.

23 But the unique issues at headquarters were very
24 straightforward. I would call up Mr. White and tell
25 him, hey, this is what we've got, this is what's going

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1 on, give him a heads-up right away. We've got a
2 problem. Any time we had two or more cases in a single
3 facility, we sent the infectious disease response team
4 out and notified headquarters what the situation was
5 there.

6 And I'll tell you, one of the most helpful things
7 was that the headquarters sponsored a weekly phone call
8 for all of the site managers so we could all share our
9 lessons learned over that, what was going on and what
10 was happening, and headquarters pretty rapidly turned
11 around guidance that we used to help us get things back
12 on track. So it was very helpful to have open
13 communications between everybody.

14 CHAIR CONNERY: Thank you for that. I think it's
15 always helpful when the field can help guide
16 headquarters if they miss -- or provide guidance that's
17 not exactly useful based on what you guys see at the
18 field.

19 So for my next line of questioning, I want to
20 talk about the transition back to -- I don't know if you
21 want to call it normal, the new normal, you guys have
22 had operations throughout the pandemic, but obviously
23 some of the restrictions are being lifted, as you guys
24 spoke about with the vaccinations, things are changing.

25 So there will be a challenge with people coming

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1 back and going back to the new normal, and I just want
2 to talk -- I want to understand, Mr. Budney, from your
3 point of view, when you look into the future, and you
4 look at this transition back, what should DOE and the
5 contractors be looking at, and if you do enact, say, a
6 more liberal telework policy, how do you manage
7 minimizing the impact to DOE's oversight and the
8 effectiveness and contractor safety management programs
9 in the event that when you return to work that there is
10 more flexible telework policy?

11 MR. BUDNEY: Well, whatever telework policy we
12 develop will be based on individual positions. Some of
13 the representatives have far less telework than perhaps
14 the IT department, for example, but throughout the
15 pandemic, and going into the future, the requirement
16 will always be, because we have operating facilities,
17 those urgent contractor staff would still come on the
18 site every day. We expect the EA staff to be on site
19 with the physical verification of the situation whenever
20 they need to do that.

21 So I don't really think telework from an
22 oversight aspect will have a big impact. Also, we've
23 been talking about this in terms of if the contractor is
24 having an in-person meeting, we would expect the
25 representatives to be there in person. So we have to

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1 maintain that teamwork environment at all times between
2 defense and the contractors.

3 While we do do oversight, we adhere to the
4 standards. There's also an aspect of teamwork that has
5 to be developed so that we understand the situations and
6 understand the environment that we're working with. If
7 you don't go out in the field and see what it's like in
8 August, at H tank farm, we're clocking in at noon and
9 you start, you know, lifting requirements that don't
10 take those physical conditions into consideration, then
11 it won't be long before you have a real problem.

12 Additionally, we'll have to have some presence
13 just to help our own workforce. You know, since the
14 start of the pandemic, we were able to increase our
15 federal workforce from 213 to 232. Universally the
16 people we employed were employees that needed field
17 initial qualifications. The difficulty with having the
18 mentors and understand having a personal conversation
19 with people has been a challenge through various points
20 over that last year.

21 So we are going to need some on-site presence to
22 help new employees as we continue to bring them on board
23 throughout the onboarding program. So those are the
24 things we're watching carefully in order to maintain
25 that teamwork environment and help them with issues as

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1 they come up.

2 CHAIR CONNERY: Thanks. So for Mr. White, DOE
3 has identified lessons learned from the pandemic. How
4 are these lessons learned institutionalized, how are
5 they shared across DOE to the field offices and the
6 contractors and did you see any differences in how those
7 lessons learned were and will be applied going forward?

8 You know, and I think looking at it from a
9 cultural aspect, too, when folks come back, you have a
10 very hard working workforce, and people tend to go to
11 work when they're not feeling well and just try to power
12 through. We see that in Washington all the time and
13 obviously the lessons of COVID are perhaps you should
14 not do that, and perhaps we should be a little bit more
15 encouraging of people staying home when they're sick,
16 just for an instance, but can you talk about what the
17 lessons learned are and how they were promulgated?

18 MR. WHITE: So -- and the promulgation was done
19 in a number of different ways. Like there wasn't any
20 one specific method for communicating lessons learned,
21 but I'll just walk through just a few of them, because I
22 think it kind of spans the spectrum.

23 At least initially, one of the -- sort of the
24 immediate focus was to ensure that we had really good
25 communication across the organization. So for the first

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1 couple of months after March of 2020, we had -- you
2 know, I had morning meetings with all of my senior
3 staff. I had daily meetings with our field office
4 managers at that point in time, instead of the weekly
5 meetings.

6 We had daily meetings across the department for
7 the department's leadership team. Either myself or Todd
8 would participate in those meetings. And so the primary
9 point of all those discussions initially, two things,
10 one was to make sure that we were addressing issues that
11 came up in a way that was consistent with the policy and
12 guidance we were developing, and then also to make sure
13 that we were sharing lessons learned in terms of
14 obstacles or challenges or things that maybe didn't work
15 quite as well as we thought they would work when we put
16 them out.

17 So I think that was a very important sort of
18 informal way of sharing lessons learned. There were
19 some cases where we saw something happen that was
20 unexpected and we felt it was important enough to
21 capture that more formally. Some of the issues with
22 ventilation that Mike talked about, you know, we thought
23 were important enough that the entire enterprise needed
24 to see them in sort of a written form. So EM and NNSA
25 worked together to put together a safety alert laying

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1 out some of the challenges that we saw on the
2 ventilation side to make sure that the entire complex
3 got those.

4 Our contractors across the enterprise I think did
5 a really good job of working together to share lessons
6 learned. The Energy Facility Contractors Group, EFCOG,
7 got involved very early in trying to work together and
8 share lessons learned. They put together their own
9 lessons learned document, best practices across all of
10 our contractors and sort of helped in that regard, so we
11 really appreciated that effort on their part.

12 And then there are things as we go forward, I
13 want to try to make sure that we capture in policy or
14 other space as we think about things that we learned
15 that are -- that I wouldn't want to lose. Not just sort
16 of things that we want to fix, but things that I think
17 we did really well that I would like us to be able to
18 continue to take advantage of as we move forward.

19 You know, just one example of that. You know,
20 Mike talked about some of the challenges associated with
21 onboarding new employees, and I think that's certainly
22 something that we -- that, in fact, is a little bit
23 difficult for new folks to get acclimated to an
24 organization virtually as opposed to in person. But as
25 we tried to work around that, particularly at

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1 headquarters, I think we identified some things that we
2 would want to keep going forward.

3 So, for example, in Greg's group, some of the new
4 folks that came on board, you know, normally would have
5 a peer group at headquarters who helped bring them up to
6 speed in terms of the department's policy and approach
7 and so the things that are important from a department
8 or program perspective. As they stepped back and
9 thought about this, if we have to do this virtually, you
10 have access to more than just the headquarters folks,
11 right? So as you bring safety folks on board, and you
12 think about working in a virtual environment, now we can
13 involve all of our field offices and their cadre of
14 mentors and help by bringing them on board.

15 And so I think it really expanded for new folks
16 their access to the organization. So, you know, as we
17 think about this going forward, you know, I want to be
18 able to bring back the in-person, informal mentoring, as
19 we can, but I also don't want to lose the idea that we
20 ought to take advantage of the fact that we can operate
21 in a virtual environment and expand that network to help
22 new folks take advantage of expertise across the entire
23 enterprise, not just what exists at headquarters.

24 So things like that we need to work on capturing.
25 Some of this has made it into the revisions to, you

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1 know, the department's policy and guidance as it came
2 out, some of the lessons learned on masks and
3 ventilation showed up in the March 2020 guidance that
4 reflected what CDC had learned over the course of the
5 past year.

6 Other things we're working on as part of our
7 re-entry planning, going forward, you know, the
8 department is currently very actively engaged in
9 thinking about how we bring folks back to work, how many
10 folks come back to work, in what phases they might come
11 back to work, how much flexibility we allow for
12 telework. And I think all of that needs to incorporate
13 some of the lessons that we've learned that you talked
14 about over the course of the past year.

15 We're also thinking about, you know, how do we
16 address issues like training and qualification? How do
17 we lay out clear expectations on unwinding some of the
18 things and flexibilities we allowed over the course of
19 the past two years where it was appropriate to do that?
20 And then make sure we capture that in a way that
21 provides some consistent guidance across the department
22 or across EM.

23 So I'm not sure if that entirely answered your
24 question, so feel free to highlight if I missed
25 something.

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1 CHAIR CONNERY: No, I thought that was great, and
2 it's encouraging to know that you guys are going to keep
3 the parts of the program that are useful as you
4 re-examine, because we're looking at the same things as
5 an organization ourselves, particularly the onboarding
6 piece. We've had the same experience over the past year
7 or so.

8 So I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Summers to
9 ask a follow-on question and then go into his line of
10 questions as well.

11 MR. WHITE: Okay.

12 CHAIR CONNERY: Mr. Summers?

13 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Thanks a lot, Chair Connery.

14 Mr. White, I really appreciate you explaining how
15 you approached this pandemic that we've all had
16 challenges, and some great opportunities, too, which you
17 highlighted, which I'm pleased that you shared. I was
18 curious as to whether the formal lessons learned
19 activities that I believe DOE Enterprise Assessments
20 undertook in the fall of 2020, whether there has been
21 any follow-on activities to capture lessons learned
22 institutionally by DOE, or are there any plans hence?

23 MR. WHITE: I am not -- I mean, other than the
24 methods that I just talked about earlier where we sort
25 of I guess informally captured those lessons learned as

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1 we developed the guidance for how we operate going
2 forward, I'm not aware of a specific plan from EA to
3 update that lessons learned document.

4 Greg, are you aware of anything?

5 MR. SOSSON: Not specifically with the EA
6 assessment, but, you know, we use that information
7 particularly to inform our return-to-work plans, which
8 are, as we mentioned, still being laid out. That would
9 include the Defense Board case study that was done. You
10 know, the information out of that will all go together
11 in forming our return-to-work plan.

12 I will point out as another example, you know,
13 the -- with the pandemic, that gave us the ability to
14 exercise to some extent our COOP plans, continuity of
15 operations, and, you know, I think we did identify that
16 there were gaps in the level of planning that were done
17 early on, and that since has been, you know, upgraded.
18 And we learned that, you know, rather than have each
19 site have their own specific plan, we needed more, you
20 know, robust guidance that our COOP plan could just
21 point at.

22 So we have made some revisions to the COOP
23 planning, you know, as a result of the lessons learned
24 during the pandemic. And two other items that I think
25 are -- would be good to mention. The Federal Employee

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1 Viewpoint Survey this year was specifically modified to
2 add, so how did we do with the pandemic? So we were
3 able to collect a lot of good data on how the workforce
4 feels that we did.

5 And also, you know, as part of returning to work,
6 the government has conducted listening sessions with the
7 employees, you know, all done in small group and all
8 rolled up so that that can also inform our
9 return-to-work planning and, you know, what the future
10 of work will look like. So there's been a lot of
11 employee involvement in getting feedback and using that
12 to inform our future plans. Thank you.

13 MR. WHITE: But I would say your point is a good
14 one from a big picture perspective, because as I think
15 about it, it may be worth the discussion with the EFCOG
16 folks, for example, to think about updating their
17 lessons learned and best practices document in a few
18 months, once we're sort of through the return-to-work or
19 re-entry process.

20 I'm learning the same thing in discussions with
21 the EA folks. I think there might be an opportunity in,
22 you know, three months or six months to sort of capture
23 the stuff that occurred between our kind of mid-term
24 look at lessons learned and then where we finally ended
25 up.

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1 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: I really appreciate both of
2 you expanding on that and hopefully we won't have a
3 pandemic to go through any time in the near future, but
4 we'll be better prepared, if so, by using some of these
5 lessons learned for sure.

6 I'd like to move on, Ms. Connery, in order to ask
7 Mr. White and Mr. Budney a few other questions
8 concerning the pandemic, and specifically with regard to
9 some of the emergency preparedness activities.

10 Mr. White and Mr. Budney, as you are well aware,
11 but for the benefit of others, throughout the pandemic,
12 DOE largely reduced the scope of emergency preparedness,
13 which Mr. White mentioned in his opening remarks,
14 reduced the scope of the emergency preparedness
15 activities, such as field drills and exercises, in order
16 to protect the workforce from the pandemic. This has
17 challenged DOE's ability to ensure that emergency
18 personnel remained both fully qualified and,
19 importantly, fully proficient in their assigned roles.

20 In lieu of field activities, the Savannah River
21 site, and many other DOE sites, has depended upon
22 virtual drills as a stop-gap measure.

23 And, Mr. White, with that said, my first question
24 is for you, sir. Normal site work activities are
25 resuming, or have already resumed in the field, as we've

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1 discussed; however, emergency preparedness field
2 activities are not yet necessarily commensurate with the
3 activities prior to the pandemic. So, sir, what is your
4 office's strategy to manage the risk created by
5 uncertainty or declining responder proficiency,
6 potentially, due to the reduction in the field
7 activities and exercises? Thanks.

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I think somebody from the
9 system muted him.

10 MR. WHITE: Can you guys hear me now? Okay.
11 Yeah, I'm not sure what happened there. I promise I
12 didn't touch anything. Although I think anyone who has
13 had me on video will tell you that I am not necessarily
14 the most proficient person at operating this video
15 equipment, so I promise that was not my fault.

16 So as I was saying, you know, the issue with
17 drills and exercises, I think, was a lot like the issue
18 with training and qualification where we felt we had to
19 take a short-term very manageable, I believe, approach
20 to looking at risk for our emergency response programs
21 in order to take a very necessary step to be able to
22 manage the short-term risks associated with protecting
23 the health and safety of all the workers who would have
24 to be involved. So I think that was a very necessary
25 short-term tradeoff for us to make.

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1 I will say this, you know, as I look at the data
2 across the enterprise, I think we've actually made some
3 progress in learning how to do these things, both in
4 person and virtually, and to do them safely. And so if
5 you look across the sites, you know, what we did in
6 terms of 2020, where I think maybe about half of the
7 normal exercises that we had planned to do ended up
8 either being cancelled or being switched into sort of a
9 virtual environment. And if you look at what we're
10 doing in 2021, I think you'll see the department has
11 already started shifting back to a more normal routine
12 for the in-person exercises.

13 And part of it is a little bit about learning how
14 to do the in-person things in a way that's safe that
15 allows for social distancing, that allows for the right
16 controls, and as we're able to change some of the
17 controls with vaccination being in place, I think that
18 opens up opportunities and flexibility as well. But
19 part of what we have to do going forward, just like with
20 training and qualification, is make sure that as part of
21 our -- I'll call them re-entry plans, for lack of a
22 better term, but whatever our terms are in terms of how
23 to get from where we are right now to what, as I think
24 you, Ms. Connery, or Ms. Roberson, referred to as our
25 new normal, in six months or a year. How we get our

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1 emergency response programs back up to a normal standing
2 has to be a part of that. And I know the folks on
3 Greg's team have worked on sort of a white paper or
4 guidance paper that kind of lays out what our field
5 offices -- you know, how we might do that and what the
6 expectations are.

7 So that's certainly one of the things that we're
8 working hard to incorporate into our planning, how to
9 get back to a normal pace. Because it is a very
10 important activity, and I agree with you that, you know,
11 proficiency is only achieved by practicing and doing it.
12 And so there's no really great substitute for that.

13 I will say, though, that one of the things that's
14 not just for emergency response, but also for
15 continuity. There are some things that I think we've
16 learned over the course of the past two years that are
17 positive, right, and we don't want to lose things.
18 Because I think all of us have learned how to operate
19 better and more effectively in a virtual environment,
20 and I think that creates opportunities for us to
21 actually significantly improve our continuity programs
22 and our emergency management programs going forward in
23 thinking about how we use all of those tools that we've
24 all learned how to become proficient at and incorporate
25 them better into our normal preparedness processes. I

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1 think there's an opportunity for us to do that and so,
2 you know, we intend to do that as well.

3 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Very good. Very glad to
4 hear you plan to incorporate some of the hard lessons
5 learned to take advantage of those opportunities for the
6 future. At this time, I would like to turn over the
7 line of questioning to Ms. Roberson.

8 Ms. Roberson, over to you now.

9 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, Mr. Summers.

10 I'd like to just do a followup on that. I
11 appreciate Mr. White's response and I would like to just
12 go to Mr. Budney who, you know, you're there in the
13 field, and, you know, I'd ask you to just describe
14 Savannah River specifically. We know you guys are
15 taking Herculean efforts to close these gaps, but can
16 you describe the gap that you're addressing as it
17 pertains to training and qualification of your emergency
18 response operation -- emergency response organization
19 members and how -- what is your plan, and if you have
20 timing, how do you see that gap getting closed? Are
21 there changes you want to make to how you execute those
22 requirements? Just describe the gap for Savannah River
23 and how you plan to close that for your ERO members.

24 MR. BUDNEY: Sure. And as I said before, we have
25 about 66 percent of our site ERO members maintain their

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1 qualification and certification, 82 percent of the
2 facility folks have. So we do have a little bit of a
3 gap to close. As we get the re-entry plan from
4 headquarters, then we'll sit down with the contractors
5 and figure out what the schedule ought to be to tighten
6 up those qualifications and get everybody recertified in
7 as short a time period as we can.

8 A lot of the issue with any of those
9 qualifications is actually participating in physical
10 drills, and so we'll have to sequence those drills to
11 cycle those folks to get back their practical
12 experience.

13 I would tell you one other thing, though, one of
14 the things we have to do here is to build the operations
15 center. So we're contemplating how we design that
16 facility. One of the issues we recognized was that
17 there may be situations in an emergency where key folks
18 that we want to participate in the EOC can't get back
19 right away.

20 I learned this a long time ago when I had field
21 management control oversight when I was in the military,
22 and trying to figure out how to tie in the
23 decision-makers who were in transit somewhere so that
24 they could participate in the decision-making virtually.
25 And we did sort out how to do that, but we want to do

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1 the same thing here. We want to have virtual capability
2 to augment the physical presence of personnel.

3 I don't think it replaces it, because the data
4 rate is always higher when you're face to face, you've
5 got everybody in the same room. So we're not looking to
6 replace, just a way to augment, especially over the
7 short term, and this pragmatic has actually afforded us
8 the opportunity to concentrate to a great degree on how
9 to fill what we call web-EOC.

10 And so we've been training our staff on how to
11 execute emergency operations virtually, and we're going
12 to incorporate those capabilities as we develop the
13 response EOC so that if I'm on travel somewhere, I could
14 still fly in and see what's going on if an emergency
15 were to develop where we had to engage an EOC, but we're
16 a long ways away and can't get there. Or even if I'm at
17 home and it's a major storm, flooding, earthquake,
18 whatever, and it's tough to get to the site for a couple
19 of hours, that you can get the key folks that you need
20 engaged. So because we had to shift a lot of our drills
21 to virtual, it enabled us to really start to concentrate
22 and develop how to make it work.

23 That said, we executed about 72 percent of the
24 planned drills in 2020, fiscal year '20. Right now
25 through '21, we're up to 77 percent of our planned

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1 drills. There is more of a focus on virtual drills, but
2 we had to start getting back into some field play. And
3 we've been able to continue to facilitate the plan,
4 anyways. Just trying to man that EOC and bring a whole
5 bunch of people in there is a challenge.

6 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Well, thank you, sir. It
7 is good to hear that there are some experiences that are
8 going to transition at the field level, and hopefully
9 continue to enhance your program, because I believe more
10 practice means more better. So I'm glad to hear that.

11 Thank you, Ms. Connery.

12 CHAIR CONNERY: I would just like to point out,
13 though, that depending on virtual is also problematic,
14 as, you know, connections drop if there are severe
15 storms, people's power goes out. I think we've all had
16 that experience as well. So I think this is where
17 defense-in-depth and redundancy is going to be really
18 important if you are going to continue in the virtual
19 environment for any of these important conversations,
20 and certainly if you were doing emergency ops.

21 So we've seen that on site in general with
22 communications without even looking at it as a virtual
23 communication, where the telephone lines or the radios
24 don't work particularly well in emergency situations.
25 So I think this is a time where we have to make sure

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1 that our IT is specifically well addressed and robust in
2 order to make those things possible.

3 So, Mr. Budney, I do have another question for
4 you, and this is about when you do the drills and
5 exercises, as you ramp up, as people come back to work,
6 we know that folks are coming back with kind of a
7 different mindset, right? So there's a human factor of
8 trying to recreate the muscle memory that may have been
9 lost over the past year with some of these activities,
10 as well as the challenges of still having the delta
11 variant of COVID and not everybody being vaccinated.

12 Can you describe any of the changes that you've
13 made or plan to make to ensure that any in-person drills
14 or exercises are conducted both safely and effectively
15 from both COVID-19 and a human factor standpoint going
16 forward?

17 MR. BUDNEY: Sure. Yeah, we've been able to walk
18 our way through some of those drills initially, because
19 we don't know precisely what the mix is going to be of
20 personnel vaccinated and not vaccinated, who's got to
21 maintain social distancing, who doesn't. And so in the
22 drill environment, we'll have to maintain the CDC
23 guidance, maintain social distancing, and as we go
24 through that it will probably affect us a little bit and
25 EOCs will get back in there and figure out how many

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1 people we can bring in and how closely they can sit
2 together. And so we're going to have to walk through
3 that process as we start bringing folks back in.

4 I think that's the best I can tell you at this
5 point. I haven't brought that big team back in yet to
6 do that. But I would tell you the one thing, just to
7 make sure I'm clear, the virtual stuff is augmentation
8 until you can get the people physically in the room. A
9 primary response to any kind of spill is as it was
10 before, you get the people to EOC, you get the people at
11 the facility to operate. So --

12 CHAIR CONNERY: Thank you. I do understand
13 augmentation only at this point and also while we're
14 still ramping up to go back in person. So I appreciate
15 the clarification.

16 Over to Mr. Summers for the next question.

17 Mr. Summers?

18 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Sorry about that. Thank
19 you. I had to find the mic'. Thanks, Ms. Connery.

20 So, Mr. Budney, this is a question for you, sir.
21 From an oversight perspective, it seems like it would be
22 difficult to be confident that the site will take the
23 appropriate response in real-world events without many
24 recent field drills or exercises to demonstrate the
25 site's capabilities.

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1 How well do virtual and table talk drills and
2 exercises alone provide you and management confidence in
3 the site's responses? Thank you.

4 MR. BUDNEY: Well, the operators in the field,
5 you know, our emergency response personnel, the fire
6 department, the security forces, all those folks who
7 actually have to respond in person, their jobs continued
8 throughout the pandemic. So I am confident that our
9 security folks will respond, that our fire department
10 folks will respond. They were among the first of our
11 folks to get vaccinated. So I'm not too concerned about
12 the folks who actually have to physically go to the
13 site.

14 You know, the operators, as we said, two-thirds
15 of the personnel at any facility have continued to do
16 those actual drills in the facility, just not the
17 site-wide things. It's a question of getting the
18 leadership re-engaged in a physical environment in the
19 emergency operating center. The virtual drills help you
20 maintain your theoretical knowledge, but the pace of
21 events could be different when you're in person than you
22 can approach virtually.

23 We have developed a web-EOC that could get up to
24 eight breakout rooms, so you can work items in parallel,
25 but there's no -- it's kind of one person speaking one

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1 at a time. If you go in the EOC, we've got the senior
2 staff in one room talking about what we would do based
3 on how events may unfold. The operations staff is
4 running the event at the main facility, the
5 meteorological staff, who they're the top point, works
6 much more rapidly I think than you can simulate in a
7 virtual environment.

8 So that will be the thing we can start with
9 efficiency and management and the information is slow
10 where in person it's a little more rapid.

11 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Thanks, Mr. Budney. I do
12 have a follow-on question, and it concerns, you had
13 mentioned the innovation of the web-EOC, which sounds
14 great, you know, I'll certainly look forward to looking
15 into how you're implementing such an innovative
16 technique to make sure that the proper decision-makers
17 are involved in all emergencies, accidents, incidents,
18 et cetera.

19 So obviously, the IT as well as communications
20 capabilities have had to increase. Is that something
21 that along with the cybersecurity concerns that have
22 recently been in the news as well across our nation, are
23 those IT communications in cybersecurity capabilities
24 areas that you expect growth in order to use and
25 leverage those capabilities for the future?

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1 MR. BUDNEY: During the pandemic, we grew our
2 bandwidth for the IT system tenfold. I don't know that
3 for emergency services that we will need more capability
4 in that area than we have, but we're continuing to look
5 at it. I know my IT folks always want to do a little
6 bit more than I ask, which is good, they keep pushing
7 us.

8 And certainly the security concerns are not new
9 to us. I'm the operations official for the
10 cybersecurity system here at the site, I take it very
11 seriously, and the team works constantly with
12 headquarters, with regular inspections of our systems,
13 assessments. So we've taken it very seriously on the
14 cybersecurity. And if you had to ask me one thing that
15 keeps me up at night, it's what's the next cyber threat
16 is what we worry about all the time here and make sure
17 we keep it clean. And that's a challenging area. It's
18 particularly challenging in the personnel area to keep
19 your staff. Those are high-priced folks that there's a
20 lot of demand for throughout the country.

21 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Thanks, Mr. Budney.

22 And if my fellow Board members will indulge me
23 for one more follow-on. Because of the innovation that
24 you've expressed with web-EOC and the other capabilities
25 that you've expanded in IT, communications, et cetera, I

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1 was curious if you have or if you plan to share those
2 capabilities and the information that you have, and I
3 understand some of this is proprietary, but some of the
4 web-EOC lessons that you've incorporated shared
5 throughout the enterprise so that they can take
6 advantage of the hard lessons that you've already
7 learned. Thank you.

8 MR. BUDNEY: Yeah, absolutely. We actually have
9 a biweekly forum with all the site managers and that's
10 the sort of thing we share. And we have a team of set
11 folks on the sites to tell them how we do our business
12 and particular areas where we've enjoyed some success,
13 so we'll continue that with the web-EOC.

14 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: I'm glad to hear it. Thank
15 you, fellow Board members, and, Ms. Connery, ma'am, it's
16 over to you for the next lines of questioning. Thank
17 you.

18 CHAIR CONNERY: Okay, and, shocker, I'm going to
19 detour again, just because I had a private question that
20 came to mind for Mr. White. It has to do with the
21 personnel issues with COVID and, you know, there was a
22 lot of folks who were facing a lot of difficulties,
23 isolation, family members who were sick, and I just
24 wanted to know if you all had done any assessments with
25 how many of your staff took advantage of the employees'

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1 assistance program. We heard the numbers were up
2 significantly across the federal government. And when
3 you look at lessons learned, particularly since you have
4 a lot of field operations underneath you, these
5 contractors who are also facing some of the same
6 conditions, are there -- is there any lessons learned
7 that you're going to implement with regards to how to
8 support the staff as they have to carry out these tricky
9 operations while facing some of these challenges both
10 emotionally and mentally and at home?

11 MR. WHITE: Thanks. So just a couple of
12 thoughts. I mean, certainly as we had our periodic, you
13 know, meetings at the headquarters level or with field
14 folks, one of the things we talked about was the
15 importance of ensuring that employee wellness overall,
16 right? I mean, as you pointed out, depending on the
17 personal situation that folks are in, the last two years
18 have been challenging for everyone, and for some people
19 even more than others, depending on the -- you know, the
20 home situation relative to caregiving or kids in school
21 and home at the same time. And then other folks, you
22 know, people handle these sort of things differently,
23 and so you would have across the spectrum of how folks
24 respond.

25 I have not specifically looked at employee

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1 assistance numbers. We certainly want to make that
2 capability available and we have taken action to
3 continue to encourage folks and make sure that we
4 communicated the availability of the program, along with
5 the availability of things like employee concerns
6 programs as well and OIG hotlines and other mechanisms
7 that employees would have to reach out.

8 You know, I try not to -- I try to leave the
9 things that need to be confidential confidential,
10 because employees should be able to use employee
11 assistance without -- without concern that, you know,
12 that somehow is perceived to be a negative thing, and
13 certainly we want to make sure that it's available.

14 I know we've talked at the site and field level
15 about the importance of management walk-arounds, looking
16 at how folks are handling controls, looking at behaviors
17 associated with folks as they come back. There can even
18 be personality types I believe being re-acclimated to an
19 environment where you are in person working with 10 or
20 15 people and you haven't had that happen for six months
21 or 12 months can be a little bit of a challenge, and I
22 think that gets to the importance of what Mike was
23 talking about earlier about having management
24 walk-arounds and communication in that regard.

25 You know, from a department perspective, looking

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1 at the programs that I do monitor, like ECP, I haven't
2 seen a noticeable uptick in the numbers of -- as a
3 matter of fact, I saw the opposite and was concerned
4 enough that I -- you know, we put forth a little bit of
5 effort that we recommunicated to folks the availability
6 of those programs to encourage people to use them. I
7 think some of the dynamics associated with folks working
8 from home might have decreased the use of things like
9 ECP because some of the issues that would come up
10 through that program don't happen when folks are working
11 virtually versus working in person together. So I think
12 that may have been a little bit of a part of that.

13 So I'm not sure if that answers your question,
14 but it certainly is a concern and certainly is something
15 I expect all of our management team to be focused on,
16 both the contractor and the federal workforce, as we
17 bring folks back. I know that, you know, for myself and
18 Todd, Todd has a weekly fireside chat with folks. So,
19 you know, every Thursday or Friday, Todd spends a little
20 bit of time virtually with random folks in the EM
21 organization just letting them talk about anything, so
22 he can get a sense of what's on people's mind and what
23 they're concerned about so we can talk about it.

24 I've had at least one EM-wide, all hands, every
25 quarter, trying to make sure folks understand what's

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1 going on. I think part of the thing with the folks is
2 making sure that we're doing a good job of communicating
3 to people what we're doing, what we're thinking about,
4 what we're thinking about relative to return-to-work and
5 re-entry at some point. We've tried to be transparent
6 with all of that planning.

7 As Greg pointed out, we've had listening
8 sessions. I've had listening sessions with all of the
9 headquarters folks. I've had them with some of our
10 field offices. Basically just open forums that let
11 people ask whatever questions they wanted and whatever
12 is on their mind in terms of concerns or issues. And I
13 think that sort of communication, that increase in
14 communication, is important going forward, because
15 that's really the best way to deal with what you're
16 talking about is to be alert, be aware and to be
17 proactive about how we communicate.

18 CHAIR CONNERY: And don't forget your extroverts.
19 We've had a hard time.

20 MR. WHITE: Yes, and as in introvert myself, I
21 try to keep that in mind, right? Some of us can handle
22 social isolation a little bit better than others. So I
23 do try to keep that in mind that not everybody is the
24 same.

25 CHAIR CONNERY: Thanks. I just want to clarify,

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1 too, for the listening audience, because you used the
2 acronym, the ECP program, which is the Employee Concerns
3 Program.

4 MR. WHITE: Yes.

5 CHAIR CONNERY: That's the one that saw the
6 downtick and the original question was about the
7 Employee Assistance Program, which is people reaching
8 out for bereavement help, for other issues that they may
9 be having, or financial or otherwise. So I think that
10 you might have seen a seesaw with employee concerns
11 going down while employee assistance questions have
12 risen across the -- across the federal enterprise as a
13 whole.

14 So that's my original line of questioning. Sorry
15 for the detour, but I thought it was important to touch
16 on that issue. So early in the pandemic, the
17 department -- as you mentioned, the department and the
18 contractors went on maximum telework, because that was
19 the posture of the CDC guidance, the federal guidance,
20 and your guidance, and as DOE established remote
21 oversight capabilities for its program and field offices
22 and enabled DOE to protect its workforce while providing
23 oversight.

24 So I was wondering, starting with you, Mr. White,
25 can you talk about how headquarters program offices have

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1 maintained their oversight effectiveness with the
2 reduced field presence during the pandemic?

3 MR. WHITE: So from a headquarters perspective, a
4 lot of the connection that we would normally have with
5 the field offices has always occurred virtually, right,
6 except for the travel, and the travel oversight side.
7 So on the headquarters side, there has been some really
8 significant reduction in the amount of travel that our
9 headquarters employees would do out to sites. The
10 exchange for that is the folks at headquarters have sort
11 of ramped up their participation in virtual activities.

12 And across the board, I think we've demonstrated
13 that we've been able to learn how to do virtual
14 assessments, right, whether it's a project management
15 assessment or whether it's a safety assessment, we can
16 do assessments virtually. I think there's a field
17 component that's missing in that one of the things that
18 when I had listening sessions with the headquarters
19 employees, one of the pieces of feedback I got in those
20 listening sessions was that they thought that that was
21 one of the components that they really missed over the
22 course of the past 18 months was the ability to travel
23 out to the sites, because there's no substitute
24 sometimes than seeing things firsthand if you want to do
25 oversight.

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1 And so I certainly got that feedback from our
2 folks who normally participate in those assessment
3 activities. Again, I mean, those are the -- what I
4 think -- I also got feedback that there's a lot that
5 we've learned about how to do it virtually that we also
6 want to carry forward. We got better participation in
7 some of our assessment types than we would normally get.
8 You get broader participation and you get the ability to
9 bring more folks into them than you otherwise might
10 have.

11 Particularly more junior folks, in terms of
12 having them participate and develop, where they might
13 not otherwise have done so if it were just a travel
14 event. And so that part of it has been positive. But I
15 do think folks have missed the ability to just -- two
16 things. One, be able to actually see the things that
17 you're doing during an activity that really enhances
18 understanding for folks, but there's also a component of
19 doing an on-site assessment activity, as all of you well
20 know, where everybody is kind of sitting in a room
21 together and having a lot of ad hoc discussions about
22 issues that come up and being able to work through those
23 in a group setting that is really, really hard to
24 duplicate virtually. And, you know, the feedback that I
25 have gotten is that our folks at headquarters really

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1 miss that activity.

2 So as we think about re-entry and return-to-work,
3 I know one of the things that a lot of our headquarters
4 folks are most excited about is being able to travel
5 again to actually get out to see site operations and
6 participate in some of these activities in person as
7 opposed to just virtual.

8 CHAIR CONNERY: Thanks. I think we've had a
9 similar experience, although I think, Mr. Budney, that
10 means you're going to get a lot of visitors coming up
11 once travel restrictions are lifted and folks can travel
12 freely, which can also present its own problems if you
13 have a rush to the field.

14 So a similar question to you, Mr. Budney, but I
15 kind of want to understand how the field assessments
16 were impacted by the policy over the past year and the
17 alternative methods that were used or considered for
18 doing the oversight. So, for instance, relying on
19 contractors, assurance system metrics or performance
20 indicators, any either field ops that were recorded or
21 walkdowns that were done with cameras. And then, you
22 know, using your fac reps and how they were used for
23 field portions of programmatic reviews, et cetera.

24 So any insights that you can offer on that I
25 think would be really helpful for us.

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1 MR. BUDNEY: Sure. Well, at the site level,
2 actually, for our personnel located at the site, not a
3 big impact due to the pandemic, more were impacted like
4 they were in final system assessments, more impacted by
5 the availability of qualified personnel and staff
6 turnover, but not usually specific to the pandemic.

7 Getting outside assessments done from whether it
8 be IT or the enterprise assessments team coming down, we
9 were missing half of those people on site, so we shifted
10 to a great deal of virtual assessments for that,
11 provided a lot of information electronically, they
12 continued to do those assessments.

13 And then we engaged with an enterprise
14 assessments, EA team, every six months to adjust
15 schedules as we needed to. And so we did have, as a
16 routine matter, make sure that they could help us where
17 we thought we needed assistance.

18 So the pandemic itself, not a huge impact.
19 Getting people out in the field down here didn't require
20 having a lot of people in close contact to do those kind
21 of things that you can do in the field. So we were
22 still able to continue operations.

23 CHAIR CONNERY: Thank you.

24 Mr. Summers?

25 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Thank you, Ms. Connery.

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1 Mr. Budney, sir, can you please discuss any of
2 the challenges or possible opportunities that you had
3 with qualifying field representatives during the
4 pandemic and how you addressed those challenges? Thank
5 you.

6 MR. BUDNEY: Well, as I said before, we did bring
7 out a number of new field reps during this time. And we
8 did lack some work for having personnel -- additional
9 personnel on site for those conversations that happen in
10 the hallway and that sort of thing, but nonetheless, we
11 did do their qualification standards and didn't adjust
12 the time limits for those.

13 We brought people in as we needed to on a case
14 basis to get their qualifications done. We had to take
15 a hard look at who was assigned as qualification
16 officers. That was a little bit of a challenge for them
17 to get the system checkouts from folks, finding those
18 people, determining their availability. You can't just
19 walk by their office and ask, hey, are you around
20 tomorrow, you had to make a specific email, phone call,
21 that kind of stuff to track them down. So we did need
22 to do some work in that area in the virtual environment
23 to make sure those people were available.

24 But we were fortunate in hiring to bring in quite
25 a few new field representatives with Navy nuclear

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1 experience, so pretty sharp individuals who know how to
2 get qualified in challenging circumstances and they're
3 making great headway and we have a number who are pretty
4 near to finishing up and soon will be moving on or
5 assembling to qualify.

6 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Thank you, Mr. Budney. I
7 appreciate the explanation about qualifying the field
8 representatives.

9 This next question has to do with the appropriate
10 number or presence of field representatives. If you
11 would, can you please discuss how you've determined the
12 appropriate facility representative field presence with
13 the risk to the workers with the risk to ensuring that
14 the contractors are performing their work safely?
15 Thanks.

16 MR. BUDNEY: Well, our field presence is provided
17 by guidance from DOE Standard 1063 on field
18 representative. So we have pretty clear standards in
19 determining the number of field representatives we need
20 to have. Of course, day to day, the number who are
21 qualified, fully qualified that we put in the field
22 fluctuates on retirements, folks taking other jobs, that
23 sort of thing. So we have been challenged in some of
24 those areas in some particular facilities, because the
25 number got quite low, but we made great progress here in

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1 shifting back up to a more acceptable level of
2 qualifications.

3 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Thank you, sir.

4 For the next questions, I'd like to turn the
5 questions or the floor over to Ms. Roberson.

6 Ms. Roberson?

7 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, Mr. Summers.

8 I think we should continue on along these lines
9 and we've talked about facility reps and, you know, we
10 were able to see that you guys did bring on some new
11 facility reps and you did continue your qualification
12 program, but I want to talk about the other safety
13 functions that we pay attention to. Safety system
14 oversight personnel, subject matter experts for safety
15 management programs, and management oversight.

16 And if you -- Ms. Connery in an earlier question
17 cited some potential techniques that might have been
18 used to continue to ensure effectiveness with reduced
19 field presence, now I wanted to ask you for some of
20 these other functions, were there specific techniques
21 you used and how were you able to maintain the
22 effectiveness in these other safety functions with a
23 reduced field presence? Mr. Budney?

24 MR. BUDNEY: Yeah, at the field representative,
25 where we had the shortage in effectiveness, as far as

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1 the system safety -- safety system specialists and
2 safety system oversight, we didn't have a big effect on
3 those numbers, although in both cases, of the numbers we
4 have on board, 42 or 44 percent of folks who are
5 qualified, most of those folks who were qualified are
6 qualified in both aspects, safety specialist and in SSO,
7 safety system oversight, and we are rapidly improving
8 that qualification status there.

9 For field reps, we had a couple of occasions
10 where we used some support service contractors to
11 augment as eyes and ears in the field for facility
12 representatives; however, though we didn't have any
13 governmental decisions made by those folks, they just
14 went out and brought back data to the field reps to
15 analyze that and make decisions on.

16 That was a temporary measure that we are not
17 going to have because we've got a more substantial
18 number of field reps back in facilities doing
19 qualifications who are qualified, so we're not using the
20 support service contractor. Those were support service
21 contractors, we tried to use retired field reps, folks
22 who had been qualified with great experience was
23 augmented over that temporary period.

24 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Okay, thank you, sir. So
25 you're not using contractors anymore at this point. Is

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1 that what I understood? To augment?

2 MR. BUDNEY: Yes, ma'am.

3 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Did you guys use virtual
4 oversight in any form? We know that's a tool we've
5 heard about in different places. Did you guys use any
6 tools like that to enhance oversight?

7 MR. BUDNEY: No, not really. You know, the best
8 example we did was we had a great UAB UAS system down
9 here run by the lab, and we used to have to take people
10 out in the field to verify the status of a lot of
11 operations out there, the sites that that would be
12 needed, that sort of thing. And we've employed those.

13 I mean, they have systems that do that kind of
14 work, to take or bring back and show the material to the
15 other regulators who were involved at the EPA. So
16 that's a savings of time and energy and knowledge to do
17 the work that way when it was required, but not virtual
18 inside facilities, no.

19 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Okay. And really one
20 last question, if I can. So fully understand during
21 COVID, because of the people impact, that you used
22 contractors. So as your workforce in these specific
23 safety oversight areas have returned to work, is there
24 a -- I don't mean it in a bad sense, but more of a good
25 will on your qual card from field observation? Is there

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1 an emphasis in ensuring that if you're a safety system
2 oversight person, you spend more time refamiliarizing
3 yourself with your systems and your facilities early, or
4 is it just a catchup as time goes on?

5 MR. BUDNEY: Well, I am not aware that we
6 adjusted the qualification programs for anyone. And to
7 be clear, there was never a prohibition from a safety
8 system oversight personnel or a security specialist
9 coming to the site if they needed to do something at the
10 site. It was just a matter of don't come to the site
11 just to sit in the office.

12 So they were still required to come in and had to
13 verify system performance when it was required and they
14 did that.

15 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, sir.

16 Ms. Connery?

17 CHAIR CONNERY: So I have a question, I think,
18 with regards to you both mentioned, I think Mr. White
19 and Mr. Budney, but particularly Mr. Budney, how you
20 onboarded a lot of people this year and I will tell you
21 that we have done the same thing. And I was just
22 wondering, in other industries, in other parts of the
23 economy, we're seeing people who we weren't expecting to
24 leave the workforce or to retire to do so and COVID kind
25 of nudged them out the door.

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1 So I'm wondering if you have any thoughts in that
2 you might not have the statistics in front of you, about
3 how many individuals have kind of left the workforce,
4 both at the site and at headquarters, in terms of
5 turnover, because that's a lot of experience that's
6 walking out the door. And, you know, they've always
7 warned us about the silver tsunami and COVID could be
8 considered a catalyst for folks leaving the workforce.

9 I just wanted to understand whether or not you've
10 noticed that at all or if the onboarding and the new
11 employees were simply fill gaps that you had previously.
12 And we can start with Mr. Budney and then go to
13 Mr. White.

14 MR. BUDNEY: So our employees -- attrition I
15 think has been pretty normal during this period, and the
16 extra folks we've brought on were just because we've had
17 difficulty. And so we got the direct hire capability.
18 We had difficulty, so with that, we were able to rapidly
19 hire personnel.

20 We're now a little concerned that I think we have
21 a few individuals who haven't identified they are going
22 to retire, but may when we execute a re-entry, and
23 that's when we ask folks to come back on site on a
24 regular basis, there may be a small group of early
25 retirements, but we haven't seen that big of a nudge

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1 there.

2 CHAIR CONNERY: That's probably good news.

3 Mr. White?

4 MR. WHITE: So I would agree with Mike's
5 characterization of the past 18 months. I think our
6 attrition, if anything, has been a little lower than
7 they otherwise have been, but I don't think we can
8 project that going forward. I would have the same
9 concern that he would going forward.

10 I think there's two things. One, there's the
11 sort of the silver tsunami like you talked about where,
12 you know, we have a fairly large percentage of our
13 workforce that will become -- either already are or will
14 become retirement eligible over the course of the next
15 few years.

16 And then, you know, this is just sort of based on
17 my own intuition and no real data, but my sense is that
18 over the last couple of years, a lot of folks have
19 thought about retiring or thought about leaving did not
20 do so due to the uncertainty associated with sort of
21 operating in a pandemic environment, and that once we
22 get to the return to whatever, you know, normal looks
23 like in six months or nine months, then they will have
24 the data at that point to make decisions that perhaps
25 they put off for the last 18 to 24 months.

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1 So I'm a little bit concerned that we will see
2 our attrition rates go up significantly for that reason.
3 I mean, I have no reason, other than just intuition, to
4 think that, but certainly something that we're watching
5 very, very carefully. We have a number of, you know,
6 sort of looking at staffing across the board and looking
7 at hiring vacancies and our HR systems can only handle
8 so much capacity in terms of hiring. And so, you know,
9 we have to sort of think about how we prioritize that
10 and how we would work to incentivize and keep people in
11 the program going forward.

12 Certainly one of the reasons that for EM is as I
13 get feedback from the listening sessions I talked about
14 earlier and the feedback from the listening sessions
15 Mike has had with his team and the meetings I have had
16 with our folks in the field, and as we think about what
17 the policy looks like in six months or 12 months in
18 terms of flexibility that the workforce would have for
19 telework, where we can get the mission done, and allow
20 for telework and remote work, I think one of the things
21 that we would lean towards is allowing as much
22 flexibility as possible, right? To make sure that we
23 encourage folks to continue to look at the EM program as
24 an opportunity that they would want to continue
25 participating in.

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1 And not that you're going to see that across the
2 country. I don't think we're particularly unique in
3 that regard. I think if you look at what other large
4 companies and other government agencies are doing, I
5 think they're seeing the same thing in terms of
6 increased levels of employee flexibility, and exactly
7 how much flexibility depends on what the nature of the
8 job is and whether folks can get the job done with
9 remote work or telework or not.

10 So certainly something to watch for, and again, I
11 don't have any hard data that would tell me that I know
12 I'm going to have a problem, but just sort of
13 intuitively, I would expect that it's something that we
14 should be on the lookout for.

15 CHAIR CONNERY: Yeah, I appreciate that. I think
16 my intuition is similar to yours, and I think it's -- we
17 have to be very careful about capturing the expertise of
18 the individuals that may be on the path to retirement,
19 and obviously we've been doing a lot of recording of
20 trainings, et cetera, because of being in a virtual
21 environment that we hope then we can give to new
22 employees as they come on, but with you having
23 fieldwork, the experience becomes a lot more important
24 in terms of individuals who are very familiar with your
25 systems and how they operate, as well as your

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1 administrative controls, et cetera.

2 So there's more -- there's more of a challenge of
3 human error I think in the field ops than probably in
4 some of the desk jobs that some of us sit in right now.
5 So we do look at that with a little bit of concern.

6 Mr. Summers had another question on the emergency
7 preparedness and response. I want to turn the floor
8 over to him for a moment.

9 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Thank you very much, Chair
10 Connery.

11 Mr. Budney, we've talked about several different
12 instances of the challenges that have gone on in the
13 covid environment and the pandemic in trying to do
14 exercises and to maintain our emergency preparedness
15 proficiency. So I was curious, when do you anticipate
16 resuming evaluating emergency preparedness exercises at
17 the facility or at the entire site level? Thanks.

18 MR. BUDNEY: So if I could, I'd like to get back
19 to you with the details on that, because we have been
20 working on the plan. We have a draft of the plan and
21 how we want to resume that. It depends on the re-entry
22 plan that we see from headquarters. So I don't have the
23 dates with me now. I can tell you we're going to do it
24 just as quickly as we can, but I'll have to get back to
25 you in the next few days.

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1 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: That's fine. Thank you.

2 CHAIR CONNERY: So just for the benefit of our
3 executive team and for our legal team, I just want to
4 note that that's a -- we're going to take that as a
5 question for the record, so Mr. Budney will get back to
6 us on the answer to that.

7 And then, Ms. Roberson, did you have any other
8 questions that you wanted to ask at this time?

9 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: I do not. Thank you,
10 Ms. Connery.

11 CHAIR CONNERY: Mr. Summers?

12 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: I don't have any further
13 questions. Thank you, Ms. Connery.

14 CHAIR CONNERY: So I just have one more question
15 for you all, which is given -- so this is kind of like a
16 wrapup question. We'll give each of you a chance to
17 wrap this up, but were there any pandemic impacts to
18 your oversight that you have identified, and if so, how
19 did you address those? Just kind of the global question
20 to all the questions that we've been asking so far with
21 regards to the impact of the pandemic.

22 And we can start at headquarters this time.
23 Mr. White?

24 MR. WHITE: So from a headquarters perspective, I
25 think the -- kind of the overall impacts are the ones I

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1 talked about earlier, where -- just a couple of areas.
2 One, the participation by headquarters folks in field
3 assessment activities has been eliminated over the
4 course of the past 18 months. That's not something that
5 I would want to continue indefinitely. I think the
6 folks at headquarters need to get out into the field and
7 have a better understanding of what's actually occurring
8 on the ground at sites.

9 And so, you know, from my perspective, looking at
10 the headquarters team, I think that's the biggest impact
11 from an oversight perspective that I've seen over the
12 course of the past couple of years. I mean, I think a
13 little bit of that is offset, again, by sort of our
14 improved ability to use virtual assessment activities.
15 We've even done things like have virtual readiness
16 assessment activities in a couple of limited cases that
17 have sort of been interesting case studies in how to do
18 that, but at the end of the day, there's no substitute
19 for some of these activities for doing them in person
20 and on the ground, and that is certainly from a
21 headquarters perspective been our primary oversight
22 impact.

23 I'll leave it to Mike to talk about the field
24 oversight impacts. My sense is in discussions with all
25 of our field office managers routinely on this, the type

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1 of assessment activity that would involve FRs and SSOs
2 getting out into the field, observing and walking down
3 operations has by and large continued, and folks have
4 been able to do that safely and successfully in large
5 part.

6 I suspect some of the larger group assessment
7 activities that might have been more focused have been
8 more challenging and more difficult either because the
9 type of operations they would look at weren't
10 necessarily occurring, or because some of the resources
11 that you would fly in to support them from other sites
12 or other parts of the department weren't available to do
13 that and would need to have stayed virtual, but I'll
14 defer to Mike to give a more detailed answer on that.

15 MR. BUDNEY: Sure. I think the one aspect that
16 has concerned me is because we don't have all the folks
17 on site that we normally do, it's making sure that the
18 folks doing oversight, especially the new people that
19 we're qualifying, understand the culture of our
20 operation and are communicating that culture. I would
21 work constructively with the contractor while holding
22 them to standards. When you bring people in, they come
23 from different environments which may be different than
24 the way we operate here. And you want them all to fall
25 in to work in the cooperative environment we have

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1 established here that enforces the standards, but
2 doesn't end up with -- personally, I always find a way
3 to get the job done, or confrontations that elevates
4 disagreements to the right level so that we can make
5 that decision and everybody is aware of what's going on.

6 And you miss that a little bit if people aren't
7 cultivated into that kind of environment, and we don't
8 have enough interaction with them at a principal level.
9 So I think that's the one area, but for the most part,
10 folks have been able to get out there in the field and
11 do the oversight and meet those requirements that we
12 need to.

13 CHAIR CONNERY: Well, I want to take a moment to
14 thank each of you for participating in this morning's
15 discussion, Mr. White, Mr. Budney, Mr. Sosson, I do
16 appreciate your time and all of the work that you and
17 your team have done in a very difficult situation over
18 the past many, many months with the COVID situation,
19 while maintaining the operations of the facilities
20 across the complex and keeping the country safe.

21 So at this time, we're going to take a break
22 before we continue with this morning's session, which
23 will be with our colleagues from the National Nuclear
24 Security Administration. So we will break for the
25 moment and we will reconvene at 11:15, same bat time,

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1 same bat channel. So we will see you all there.

2 (Whereupon, there was a recess in the
3 proceedings.)

4 CHAIR CONNERY: Welcome back, everybody. I would
5 like to call us back to order for session 2 of our
6 meeting on COVID-19 and the Savannah River site. The
7 goals for this discussion are the same as the goals for
8 session 1, but we now want to hear from the National
9 Nuclear Security Administration.

10 To briefly recap, we talked through how the
11 Department has approached operations during the COVID-19
12 pandemic and what we can learn for the next time a
13 similar situation has arisen.

14 So I want to turn to my Board members for brief
15 opening remarks and I will start with Mr. Summers.

16 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Thank you, Ms. Connery.

17 I would just like to take this opportunity to
18 thank those participating today and sharing your views
19 so that we can increase our understanding and improve
20 the dialogue between DOE and the Board. Thank you very
21 much.

22 Back to you, Ms. Connery. Thank you.

23 CHAIR CONNERY: Thank you, Mr. Summers.

24 Ms. Roberson?

25 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, Ms. Connery.

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1 I would like to just say hello to our
2 participants and thank you for doing so and I look
3 forward to the dialogue.

4 Thank you, Ms. Connery.

5 CHAIR CONNERY: Thank you.

6 And I'm going to give my personal remarks and
7 they are going to be a little bit repetitive from this
8 morning, just because I wanted to make sure that our
9 colleagues from NNSA hear them as well.

10 I am going to start off the session the same way
11 I started this morning, that we are holding this meeting
12 not because of any safety deficiencies that we or our
13 staff noted with regard to how NNSA in general, or
14 Savannah River in particular, operated during the height
15 of the pandemic. Instead, we wanted to have a
16 discussion with you about the tradeoffs you may have
17 made, how you made your choices and communicated them,
18 whatever lessons learned that you had gleaned during
19 this unprecedented situation.

20 In our view, it's important to understand how to
21 operate in a constrained environment, what innovations
22 were made, which should be carried on, and which should
23 be not carried on, as we return to a nonconstrained
24 environment.

25 As I have said in other venues, COVID has

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1 impacted us in ways that we still don't know. It has
2 impacted the entire workforce of the nuclear enterprise
3 as well. What we do know is that we were all profoundly
4 impacted and I want to acknowledge the men and women who
5 work in the NNSA nuclear enterprises for persevering
6 through a difficult and uncertain time and carrying out
7 their mission in the midst of a pandemic, while worrying
8 about their families and loved ones.

9 On behalf of us all, I want to thank you and your
10 team for a commitment to work and all that you do for
11 the American people.

12 So with that, I do want to introduce our panel
13 for this afternoon, or this morning. This second
14 session, we have Dr. Charles T. Verdon, who is the
15 Acting Under Secretary for Nuclear Security and the NNSA
16 Administrator. We also have James Armstrong, the
17 manager of the Savannah River field office. Finally, in
18 a supporting role, we have James McConnell, the
19 Associate Administrator for Safety, Infrastructure and
20 Operations.

21 Like the first panel, I believe that you all have
22 a few words to say before we start, so I will turn it
23 over to you, Dr. Verdon, for opening remarks.

24 MR. VERDON: Thank you very much. So good
25 morning, and thank you for the opportunity to speak with

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1 you this morning on behalf of NNSA and to address our
2 operations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3 You know, I'll just try to quickly summarize that
4 from the start of the COVID-19 in the United States,
5 NNSA's response was guided by protecting the health and
6 safety of the workforce while working with our field
7 offices and site leadership to continue to deliver on
8 our highest priority national security missions.

9 Just a quick, you know, how NNSA worked with DOD
10 to identify those missions that we couldn't let lapse.
11 We worked closely with them to identify those and
12 clearly it wasn't everything that we do across NNSA, but
13 it was a lot of key mission deliverables, particularly
14 related to the stockpile.

15 We provided those priorities in writing to all
16 sites along with a companion memo from the DOD and that
17 was authored by Ms. Lord, outlining similar direction to
18 the DOD organization, because there was considerable
19 overlap in the number of activities for obvious reasons.

20 The site field offices and leadership were given
21 the responsibility to determine how best to continue to
22 deliver on these identified priorities while maximizing
23 workforce health and safety.

24 Now, I'll just say quickly, in general, all sites
25 identified those essential workers needed to be on site

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1 to carry out the mission, they worked with site, local
2 and CDC health experts in how to perform the work as
3 safely as possible, implemented their recommendations
4 slowly and carefully phased the on-site work back in,
5 monitored the environment constantly and adjusted as
6 required.

7 For the workforce not required to be on site,
8 telework was implemented to the maximum extent possible.
9 Headquarters held weekly virtual meetings with all sites
10 to track progress, share lessons learned and adjust
11 priorities as required. It was a team-for-team effort.
12 It was really across the board.

13 As the pandemic proceeded, NNSA incorporated
14 national guidance as it became available, follow-on
15 guidance from the Office of Management and Budget, as
16 well as direction from the Department of Energy. All of
17 these were and are being used -- continuing to be used
18 to ensure worker health and safety while continuing to
19 meet mission requirements.

20 I would submit the DOD guidance document for the
21 record so that you will have it. NNSA also prepared a
22 plan that's subordinate to the DOE plan to guide our
23 execution of operations in these uniquely challenging
24 conditions. I signed out the plan on May 3rd of this
25 year and would also submit that for the record.

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1 Again, no surprise, the key tenets are
2 emphasizing maximum telework, a discussion of which
3 mission requirements required more than 25 percent
4 on-site occupancy of facilities, required safety
5 controls, including we did facial masks, social
6 distancing, travel approval and quarantine requirements,
7 personal habits and requirements of the workforce, and
8 evaluation of local conditions and adjusting as
9 required.

10 So the M&O leadership and partnership with the
11 field office managers will continue to make the final
12 determination on a number of the personnel allowed on
13 site or required on site and allowed on site, and the
14 work authorized at the laboratories, plants and sites.
15 Their decisions have been and will continue to use a
16 cautious, iterative and data-driven approach based on
17 expert guidance and mission priorities provided by the
18 programs and functional offices.

19 And so appearing with me today is Jason
20 Armstrong, the current field office manager of NNSA at
21 Savannah River, and he had, you know, on-the-ground
22 responsibility, so I think given the overall guidance, I
23 would ask him to give you further details that are
24 specific to the Savannah River site, because each site
25 we recognize is slightly different and that's why we did

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1 it -- took the approach we had where we had the field
2 offices and the site managers really take the local
3 responsibility of implementing the priorities that we
4 were providing to them.

5 So with that, with your permission, I will turn
6 it over to Jason for his comments.

7 CHAIR CONNERY: Absolutely.

8 MR. ARMSTRONG: Hi, good morning. Thank you for
9 providing me the opportunity to share with you the great
10 work our team is doing at the Savannah River site. I
11 believe our agencies share common interests in the safe
12 operation of our nation's defense nuclear facilities.
13 That's why I welcome this opportunity to share with you
14 how we are managing our resources and our teams during
15 the pandemic.

16 I'll first share with you the resiliency and
17 innovation our team at Savannah River tritium enterprise
18 to meet our nation's security mission while still
19 preserving the health and safety of our workforce during
20 the pandemic. Early on, the Savannah River site
21 established the infectious disease response team. This
22 team established a war room that was meant to lead,
23 manage, address and be responsive to the dynamic changes
24 associated with the pandemic.

25 The Savannah River site also developed a COVID-19

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1 management plan to ensure a clear and uniform guidance
2 was communicated across the entire site. Our M&O
3 partner, Savannah River Nuclear Solutions for tritium
4 facilities also tailored a site COVID-19 management plan
5 that enabled mission-essential work activities to be
6 conducted safely while keeping our workforce healthy.

7 For example, control room entry was limited
8 essential to personnel, work authorization was conducted
9 remotely where possible, and guidance was issued on
10 sanitation protocols in the control room. Facility
11 walkdowns were also conducted in compliance with the
12 management plan.

13 Our commitment to emergency preparedness never
14 faltered during this period. From innovative ideas,
15 such as a COVID observer during drills, and utilizing
16 available technology, the Savannah River tritium
17 enterprise completed 100 percent of all drills that were
18 scheduled. They also performed an unannounced drill and
19 they conducted the annual facility-graded exercise.

20 We ensured all our emergency response personnel
21 were trained, qualified, while still adhering to strict
22 COVID-19 safety measures. Our field office also
23 remained resilient and engaged as well. Our facility
24 representatives developed a rotating schedule while
25 adhering to strict COVID-19 protocols and they remained,

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1 I'm proud to say, COVID-free.

2 Our safety system oversight engineers, our
3 nuclear safety specialists, our weapon quality
4 engineers, our health physicists, our safety
5 professionals, were also engaged. They employed a
6 hybrid work environment where they would review
7 documentation off site and then come on site to perform
8 their independent verification reviews, their
9 assessments and field walkdowns, also shadowing and
10 working with the facility representatives.

11 As we developed a plan to a less constrained work
12 environment, several changes await us. The one constant
13 is, though, my commitment to safety as my number one
14 priority and the safety and health of my workforce is
15 also my priority. And to ensure that our operations at
16 defense nuclear facilities are conducted safely.

17 So I want to thank you again for this opportunity
18 to share with you our resiliency and innovation during
19 this pandemic by continuing to commit to the health and
20 safety of our workforce. This pandemic really identify
21 how our teams can be resilient, strategic, and at the
22 end of it all, they all become very innovative, and they
23 have open communications with me at all times and share
24 with me great ideas to prevent and maintain the
25 workplace safety.

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1 So I look forward to further discussions with you
2 all and thank you again.

3 CHAIR CONNERY: Thank you both for your opening
4 remarks. That was really helpful and enlightening, and
5 for the documentation that you provided to the meeting
6 for the public as part of the record of the meeting.

7 So I would like to turn the first line of
8 questioning over to Board Member Roberson to start.

9 Ms. Roberson?

10 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, Ms. Connery.
11 And thank both of you, as well, too, for your opening
12 comments.

13 I guess I would like to start with you,
14 Mr. Armstrong. You touched on this in your comments,
15 and I would like to give you an opportunity to explain
16 it. At DOE sites where there are multiple programs
17 occupying a site and multiple contractors, sometimes
18 shared, sometimes not, we often see challenges in
19 communication and coordination, and I know you talked
20 about how the Savannah River tritium enterprise
21 established a war room. I wanted to ask you to expand a
22 little bit more on how your organization and
23 Mr. Budney's organization did work together to ensure
24 consistent approaches and execution of pandemic controls
25 across the site.

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1 MR. ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Ms. Roberson.

2 I will share with you at the Savannah River site,
3 when I came here, I believe Mike Budney's organization
4 had developed the infectious disease response team.
5 They had developed a war room. In that war room, they
6 also invited my organization to be part of that. And so
7 we would engage, at least weekly basis, talking to the
8 folks on the team, and it was comprised of both federal
9 staff and our M&O teams, and they would share with us
10 the challenges they were having, the COVID rates they're
11 getting, with numbers of illnesses, those that were in
12 quarantine, and some best practices and what they're
13 learning and what they're hearing.

14 So it was really with that close collaboration
15 that NNSA has with the EM site that we were able to
16 remain in constant conversation.

17 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, sir. So,
18 again, also, Mr. Armstrong, as we know, the pandemic
19 introduced new worker hazards that could challenge the
20 contractor's ability to maintain minimum staffing
21 requirements which are needed to ensure safe operations.
22 Many of the pandemic hazards and controls, like
23 mandating mask use and social distancing, were being
24 identified at the federal level and evolved as knowledge
25 and experience evolved with the pandemic.

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1 Normally, DOE incorporates requirements into its
2 contracts and relies on the contractor -- the contractor
3 safety management programs -- to identify and address
4 new hazards in DOE reviews and oversees the results of
5 those. So I wanted to ask you, with SRS having multiple
6 facilities under different contract management, can you
7 discuss how NNSA, the NNSA field office, oversaw
8 consistent implementation of these new pandemic controls
9 across its activities?

10 MR. ARMSTRONG: Are you talking specifically at
11 the Savannah River tritium facilities?

12 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Yes, sir.

13 MR. ARMSTRONG: Corporate level. So the
14 contractor at the Savannah River tritium facility is
15 Savannah River Nuclear Solutions. They are the main
16 contractor there, my primary interface, responsible for
17 the execution of tritium activities. So we can talk
18 routinely, we talk every day, we communicate first thing
19 in the morning, every morning, their whole team and my
20 whole team. We talk about what protocols we have
21 implemented for working safety with COVID, both from a
22 federal perspective and also from our M&O perspectives.
23 And then my team will go out and evaluate and make sure
24 that we're doing that and they would also do the same.

25 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, sir.

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1 So if you can discuss a little bit for us as far
2 as how controls were executed and ensured in control
3 rooms where you have often times limited space, demand
4 for face-to-face communication, interaction, and often
5 times a lot of foot traffic. Can you discuss how you
6 ensured proper implementation of the pandemic controls
7 to maintain minimum staffing requirements in the control
8 rooms for the operations that were ongoing?

9 MR. ARMSTRONG: So, yes, I can. Thank you. So
10 the -- as you conveyed, the control room can be a very
11 busy environment, and during this pandemic, we learned
12 that the value of social distancing and the use of face
13 masks, the use of hand sanitizer, and another protocol
14 they do here, too, is whether they sit in a chair or at
15 a desk or at a table, they always wiped it down with
16 sanitary wipes to make sure that it's sanitized for the
17 next person sitting down.

18 The M&O went through and they evaluated what was
19 essential to have in the control room and they limited
20 it to those personnel only. We took advantage of
21 technology. We took advantage of in some cases using
22 the phone, when necessary. We have technology, such as
23 teams, Webex. We have phones, obviously. And then we
24 also had a lot of reminders of what safe work practices
25 are required during the pandemic time period.

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1 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, sir. I guess
2 one last question at this point for you, also. As more
3 of your workforce is vaccinated, have you identified the
4 need for any additional controls or requirements to give
5 you the assurance that as you go through this
6 transition, both the workers are safe and the work can
7 be performed that you need performed?

8 MR. ARMSTRONG: Yes. Safety is the number one
9 priority of our workforce. As you're well aware, we
10 consider it a privilege and also a huge responsibility.
11 So as my team transitions to work, I feel that
12 responsibility to ensure that we can create a safe work
13 environment. Part of that includes being able to learn.

14 So at every opportunity that we have to hear from
15 our employees for ideas, we take that and we go with it
16 actually evaluate it when it's appropriate to do so.
17 It's important to have the employees who are out there
18 on the deck plate who know how to execute the work
19 safely and still efficiently and safely. And so we are
20 always looking, always listening, for what is a good way
21 to execute the work while maintaining, preventing any
22 exposure to the pandemic.

23 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: So one last question,
24 while the pandemic has been a challenge, as you cite,
25 it's always been an opportunity to learn, innovate and

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1 improve. Have there been any specific recommendations
2 or requests from the workforce that may impact -- that
3 you may consider executing going forward as the
4 workforce returns to a more normal state that you will
5 carry over?

6 MR. ARMSTRONG: So some of these I've heard is,
7 do we wear a mask when we're not around anybody, can we
8 take it off, because I don't want to trip and fall. And
9 that's our overriding priority. I don't want anybody
10 tripping and falling just on their own, walking through
11 a parking lot or walking from one facility to the next
12 facility. Those are things that we share. And, you
13 know, we get those ideas implemented.

14 Ideas that have been recommended in addition to
15 hand sanitizer, where we can, we've located them
16 somewhere else when we can do that. We look for
17 opportunities to allow our workers to have all the
18 safety tools and equipment that they need, even before
19 the pandemic, and now after the pandemic, or during the
20 pandemic, we're learning where those best places to have
21 the hand sanitizer, where can employees get a mask if
22 their mask breaks, where can an employee talk to their
23 supervisor or talk to a peer or talk to some other
24 worker advocate so they can share other ideas that they
25 may have to execute their work in a safe manner.

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1 So, Ms. Roberson, we're constantly engaging and
2 developing and, you know, a big part of this, too, is
3 everybody's asking -- we're just -- what's the future
4 look like? And it's very important to me that we convey
5 that their health, their safety, is our priority, is our
6 nation's priority, and that we have to meet them where
7 they're at and help them have the right tools so they
8 can do the work.

9 They're still passionate about our mission. When
10 we come to our facilities, you'll hear that and you'll
11 see it and they want to take care of how to do it in
12 this COVID pandemic, this is one of the few facilities
13 that went right to work, and they learned so much along
14 the way. I've only been here almost three months now
15 and I hear the charge from them and I see the innovation
16 every day, and how they -- how they have addressed
17 issues and worked through challenges to resolve them.
18 And so it truly is remarkable.

19 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, Mr. Armstrong.
20 Back to you, Ms. Connery.

21 CHAIR CONNERY: So I'd like to continue along the
22 similar line of questioning, Mr. Armstrong, about the
23 challenges of transition, right? So you talked about
24 some of the opportunities in transition with the
25 workforce and where you're trying to predict what the

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1 challenges might be. So you've gone from, you know,
2 maximized telework, which I realize was limited for you
3 all, given the mission that you have, and then 25
4 percent in the workforce, and now return-to-work plans
5 are due to OMB some time mid-July, July 18th, I think it
6 is.

7 So I kind of want to understand from your point
8 of view what the challenges that you foresee happening
9 with the workforce returning to work, and should the
10 department or the contractors enact more flexible
11 telework policy, how do you minimize the impact to DOE's
12 effectiveness, particularly its oversight effectiveness
13 and contractor safety management programs in the event
14 that there is a more lenient telework policy going
15 forward?

16 MR. ARMSTRONG: So early on, during the pandemic,
17 the NNSA put all its leadership through emotional
18 intelligence training, by being aware of emotions, self
19 management. I think that began the groundwork for our
20 huge challenge that awaits us as we go from an
21 organization and what's the best way to transition our
22 workforce back to the office. You know, the hybrid work
23 environment. It's not as simple as turning on a switch
24 and saying I want everybody back at the office to today.

25 As you know, there are ongoing challenges with

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1 COVID-19. We hear of the delta, we hear of other things
2 happening. And so we remain aware and engaged.

3 As we go forward, a big part of it is not only
4 physical health, there's also mental health. We want to
5 understand, Mr. White mentioned earlier about people are
6 home and being caregivers to their children, to their
7 grandparents, in some cases even their pets, right.
8 When they leave their pet now and go back to the office,
9 is an emotional event for some people.

10 And so we have to balance all that to come back
11 to work. We also have to balance our very important
12 national security mission. And so we start looking at
13 what does effective oversight look like, and what does
14 it mean? And it means that we are -- we have an
15 awareness of the work that's going on. We are a
16 demanding customer. We hold them to be accountable for
17 their work. And so we need to have our people out there
18 in the field observing -- observing the work. Also
19 observing what is being performed on the assessments.
20 We value those assessments. We participate with them in
21 meetings to see what strategies they're developing for
22 new work activities.

23 So I start looking at this -- which part of our
24 organization is critical for that, and what does coming
25 back to work look like for you. And then there's also a

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1 need to have -- we have had these listening sessions to
2 understand what do the employees want. And what do they
3 need to be successful in a hybrid work environment. We
4 are learning. There is power in coming back to work. I
5 believe some high-tech companies call them collaboration
6 days, where they bring everybody back into the office
7 for two or three days a week, because they recognize
8 that there is -- while we became super innovative here
9 in maximized telework, we might become even more
10 innovative if we develop a collaboration day.

11 And so those are all things, Ms. Connery, that I
12 look at and I talk with Dr. Verdon and his team as we
13 return back to work.

14 CHAIR CONNERY: I appreciate that. I really love
15 the idea of getting folks trained on emotional
16 intelligence and looking at the whole of your workforce
17 and all of the challenges that they face, because your
18 workforce is part of your safety system.

19 I think the other point that we brought up in the
20 earlier session was to have normalizing taking work off
21 when you're sick, right? I think that is something that
22 we here in Washington don't do very well and I'm sure
23 it's a challenge on the site, too, particularly with
24 hourly wage workers to be able to have the opportunity
25 to take time off of work when they're sick or when a

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1 family member is sick, to take that pressure off of them
2 so that they can return to work. So I appreciate your
3 answer on that.

4 A question for you, Dr. Verdon. DOE identified
5 lessons learned from the pandemic, and we asked the same
6 questions of the panel earlier, and I just wanted to get
7 your perspective on it. How were these lessons learned
8 from the NNSA side of the house, how are they
9 institutionalized and how were they shared across the
10 field offices and contractors so that everybody was able
11 to benefit from them?

12 MR. VERDON: Yeah, so as I said, we took an
13 approach of sharing lessons from the get-go, the very
14 first meeting we were sharing our shared experiences
15 back and forth across the complex and we just continued
16 to do that. So we documented, as we've documented the
17 lessons, and we just openly shared them and we continue
18 to do so.

19 And as I say, not only within our own
20 organization, we also have worked to try to help our
21 vendors when they've been willing to, you know, take
22 input from us, as well as interactions with DOD of what
23 they've learned. So we've tried to make sure that we've
24 been encompassing in all that area. But again, it goes
25 back to the communications. We've just had open and

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1 free falling communications with this to make sure that
2 we're getting the best that can be applied to each site,
3 you know, adjusting for the uniqueness of each site.

4 CHAIR CONNERY: And just a follow-on, because you
5 mentioned the Defense Department. Were they willing
6 partners in kind of helping to understand the priorities
7 of the organization in the midst of the pandemic and
8 maybe being a little bit less of a demanding customer if
9 the situation warranted?

10 MR. VERDON: Yeah, I mean, they were very good.
11 If you take something like -- I know it's not Savannah
12 River, but you take something like our OSG agents, we
13 had many interactions with them to get an idea how they
14 were continuing their training of their service members.
15 How are they continuing, you know, their necessary
16 training during the pandemic, and we were sharing back
17 information back and forth.

18 So, yeah, it was across the board. Very open,
19 very willing to learn both ways.

20 CHAIR CONNERY: Thanks, that's great to hear.

21 I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Summers for the
22 next line of questioning.

23 Mr. Summers?

24 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Thank you, Chair Connery.

25 And my first question actually is from the

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1 previous question that -- or two questions ago that
2 Ms. Connery asked Mr. Armstrong. Mr. Armstrong, I
3 really applaud the innovations, many innovations that
4 you identified to deal with the pandemic. Congrats.

5 MR. ARMSTRONG: Thanks.

6 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: I know that early on, this
7 question is concerning places of food and where people
8 go to have lunch, et cetera, meeting rooms, small
9 confined spaces, but mainly primarily focusing on
10 cafeterias and things like that.

11 Early in the pandemic, I believe it was
12 identified that some of the areas at the sites and
13 plants and laboratories were where people gather to have
14 lunch or snacks or breaks. And I was curious as to what
15 steps, if any, you've taken or that you plan to take in
16 order to limit the possible exposure or spreading of,
17 whether it's the delta variant or the golf hotel, who
18 knows, spreading of those various pandemic COVID-19
19 variants in the future? Thank you.

20 MR. ARMSTRONG: Mr. Summers, thank you for the
21 question.

22 So upon my landing at the Savannah River site
23 about three months ago, I had the pleasure of touring
24 the facilities, the administrative support areas, also,
25 with both my deputy manager at the Savannah River field

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1 office, and also the vice president for SRNS for tritium
2 enterprises.

3 And during that walk-through, we walked by the
4 kitchen. And, you know, pre-pandemic, I always loved
5 the kitchen area, right? It was always a great
6 opportunity to see how folks were doing, hear about
7 their -- somebody's daughter's new college ventures or
8 getting a new car, and that was something I really
9 missed.

10 But now, when I walk through those areas, even
11 though our M&O has a lot of people back in the office,
12 they recognize that the kitchen is not an area to
13 accumulate and sit there and talk to each other. So you
14 will see signs in that area that encourage social
15 distancing, you will see the sanitary wipes all around,
16 you will see where you can use your hand sanitizer
17 there.

18 You don't see mask wearing as much anymore,
19 because more folks are now -- those who have the
20 vaccination, they are not required to have the masks to
21 wear. So that's the M&O part there. I've been in that
22 area, probably 100 times I've been there, okay? I'm a
23 guy who likes to walk around the M&O side and see what's
24 going on. So I've only seen like two people in there.
25 And it's -- I see the K-cup coffee machines, I don't see

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1 the employees getting the coffee anymore. I see people
2 bringing their own K-cups in.

3 Now over on the federal side, I don't have as
4 many people back in the office right now. And our
5 kitchen area is very sparse. I'm usually a lone
6 customer, or when I bring the office manager in, she
7 gets to come in there, too. Our refrigerator is pretty
8 empty.

9 It's a different environment, sir, and I miss the
10 collaboration that you can achieve with the kitchen
11 area, but I tell you, it's an area where you find a lot
12 of sanitizer, wipes, even some extra masks in there and
13 plastic. That's today's environment.

14 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Thank you very much. I know
15 that it will continue to be a challenge, so I appreciate
16 you explaining how you're dealing with it at your site.
17 Thanks.

18 MR. ARMSTRONG: Sure.

19 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Dr. Verdon, Mr. Armstrong,
20 to change course a little bit, and to pass along that
21 earlier this morning we discussed some of the challenges
22 that we had, or that you had, in the enterprise in
23 maintaining emergency response proficiency, and we
24 discussed that with Mr. White and Mr. Budney, of course.

25 We are aware that NNSA has taken a different

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1 approach than the Office of Environmental Management.
2 Except for some positives at the beginning of the
3 pandemic, and possibly during some of the holidays, the
4 NNSA's Savannah River field office and the tritium
5 facilities have largely continued performing their field
6 drills throughout the pandemic.

7 First question is for Dr. Verdon. Actually, it
8 will be a two-part, in just a moment, sir. Dr. Verdon,
9 since NNSA has several work activities that support
10 mission and central functions, and in primary mission
11 and central functions, many NNSA work activities
12 continued throughout the pandemic. Some NNSA field
13 offices, such as Savannah River, Pantex and Y-12, have
14 performed field drills and exercises throughout most of
15 the pandemic, whereas some of the other NNSA field
16 offices, such as Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore, were
17 strictly limited to virtual drills during the pandemic.

18 So based on this, we have a two-part -- I have a
19 two-part question. First, sir, what is NNSA's overall
20 strategy to manage the risk created by uncertain or
21 declining responder proficiency due to the reduction in
22 field drills and exercises? And second, and going
23 forward, how do you intend to ensure that all the NNSA's
24 sites are on a level playing field and are meeting
25 emergency preparedness requirements?

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1 And I'm happy to repeat those, sir. That was a
2 long introduction and a two-part question. Over to you,
3 Dr. Verdon, sir.

4 MR. VERDON: So, again, I think what you're
5 capturing is the fact that, again, we have allowed the
6 sites to really have the field offices and the sites to
7 have that determination of what was required. And as
8 you indicated, some of the sites at which clearly the
9 more high hazard activities take place, they felt it was
10 much more important to keep those drills not virtual and
11 keep them real.

12 So they made those decisions, they -- you know,
13 we supported them in those decisions, they worked with
14 their health providers, all of the information as much
15 as possible to execute those as, you know, safely and
16 securely as possible for their workforce.

17 The sites that did do it more virtually, again,
18 it was a local decision based on their risk posture that
19 they could handle those virtually and keep the training
20 up to -- you know, up to snuff during that period. And
21 then as they returned to work, as they evolved their
22 return to work, they are working on basically bringing
23 those activities back on, potentially keeping some
24 aspects of the virtual that they found positive, while
25 going back to the more kind of hands-on, in-person

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1 training that takes place.

2 So, again, it's not a one-size-fits-all. I think
3 that what we would require is the evaluation that they
4 are meeting the requirements. How they implement the
5 requirements will still be up to them and we're giving
6 them that flexibility, but we will have the oversight to
7 ensure that they meet the requirements. If they can do
8 it with a hybrid approach or a need an all in-person
9 approach, that would be up to them to determine.

10 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Very good, Dr. Verdon.
11 Thank you, sir, for your answer.

12 I would now like to turn over the line of
13 questioning or questions to Ms. Connery.

14 Chair Connery, over to you again.

15 CHAIR CONNERY: Thank you, sir.

16 So, along the similar lines, and this is for you,
17 Mr. Armstrong. Can you talk about what changes or, you
18 know, any new controls that were implemented at the
19 tritium facility so that they could safely perform
20 in-person drills during the pandemic, since you were one
21 of the sites that were able to operate during that time.

22 MR. ARMSTRONG: Yes, I can. And you're right, we
23 did complete all of our necessary drills and exercises
24 during this period. We were able to do so, as I
25 mentioned, we really encouraged ideas and innovation

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1 during this time period and whenever we heard voices,
2 you know, one of the ideas that rose to the top was to
3 have a COVID observer. This person was a designated
4 individual that was ensured to make sure that all drill
5 participants, even observers, regular observers in the
6 drill, ensured and practiced safe COVID protocols.

7 Some of our drills already require the use of
8 masks, because that policy had not been lifted, but the
9 social distancing. I've heard stories of that COVID
10 observer coming in there and saying, you need to get a
11 little further apart. So it was like very active.

12 And so this person was -- that was their sole
13 responsibility to go out and do that. And it proved to
14 be very effective as we went through some contact
15 tracing, and so we were able to identify that any COVID
16 instance that we've had were not associated with the
17 emergency response.

18 So that COVID observer is something we consider
19 one of the best things we learned from there. Relative
20 advantage, as Mr. Budney spoke of earlier, that web-EOC,
21 and we were able to use our technical support room that
22 could be activated during a drill and workers were able
23 to participate local through the technical support room.

24 CHAIR CONNERY: So when you used the innovation
25 of the COVID observer to make sure that there was proper

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1 social distancing and people were wearing masks, did
2 that have any negative effect on the outcomes of the
3 drill from your perspective? Did it add more artifice
4 to the actual drill scenarios?

5 MR. ARMSTRONG: So when I asked the people about
6 it, I didn't -- I wasn't there during a couple of these
7 drills, where we first did that, and I asked them how
8 did that roll out and how did it feel? Some of them
9 were very proud because it was the employee's idea. And
10 so we get ideas from our team as to how we can become
11 better and actually start managing up. We were getting
12 some great ideas.

13 So the COVID observer was not considered an
14 outsider, and I think they actually welcomed it, because
15 it reinforced the need to maintain six feet apart. Of
16 course, some ideas were, why don't you wipe your hands,
17 because you just grabbed that pen, somebody else is
18 about to grab that pen now. So it was actually --
19 nobody wants to get COVID. Nobody wants to get sick.
20 We hear those stories and they're heartbreaking.

21 So I think for us the best idea was having a
22 drill participant be a COVID observer added a lot of
23 value and showed the whole organization, both federal
24 and contractor, that we care about their safety. And
25 that was the message that was received.

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1 CHAIR CONNERY: Thank you.

2 Ms. Roberson, over to you.

3 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, Ms. Connery.

4 Dr. Verdon, Mr. Armstrong, as we all know, early
5 in the pandemic, DOE and contractor oversight personnel
6 implemented a maximum telework posture, as we did. DOE
7 established remote oversight capabilities for its
8 program and field offices that enabled DOE to protect
9 its workforce while still providing oversight for its
10 essential operations.

11 So, Dr. Verdon, could you discuss briefly how
12 NNSA headquarters program office maintained their
13 oversight effectiveness, were there oversight
14 enhancements or specific oversight tools that were used
15 to ensure you had confidence, even in light of the fact
16 that there was a reduced field presence capability?

17 MR. VERDON: Yeah. So, you know, I'd say that
18 once we established what the priority of the work that
19 had to be accomplished, again, it was turning it back
20 over to the fields to determine how best to maintain the
21 oversight, you know, at the field. And I think to a
22 large extent, you know, they basically -- they didn't
23 miss a beat. They were able to do what they needed to
24 do with both hands on, as well as teleworking from the
25 oversight perspective of the field.

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1 And then as I mentioned, we had weekly updates,
2 especially during the early time when we would bring all
3 the sites together, we would review as a team what was
4 working, what wasn't working, where we may have to slow
5 down, where we could actually pick up speed.

6 So it was -- again, it was just open
7 communications, but the oversight, again, we turned and
8 relied heavily, as we do every day, on the sites, the
9 field offices in particular, to provide local oversight.
10 And then from headquarters, we would, you know, again,
11 review from our level what -- you know, how things were
12 going and taking their input.

13 And also taking the temperature across the entire
14 site, you know, across the entire complex. If one site
15 was experiencing something and others weren't, we would
16 try to figure out what was going on and make sure that
17 we understood that was it something that we need to be
18 aware of across all sites or was it just particularly
19 germane to that one site in particular.

20 So again, reliance on the field offices didn't
21 change in that regards.

22 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, sir.

23 So to you, Mr. Armstrong, in light of the hour.
24 Can you answer the same question, since Dr. Verdon has
25 said, over to you, and also, in your response to that

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1 question, I'd ask you to specifically address execution
2 of field assessments and how they were in practice with
3 the maximum telework policy and reduced field presence
4 in place. And, you know, if there were specific
5 enhancements, oversight enhancements or oversight tools
6 that you used that maybe you hadn't used before. If you
7 could discuss that briefly for us.

8 MR. ARMSTRONG: I'll be happy to. Because one of
9 the first questions I asked when I came over to the
10 Savannah River team was to understand where we're at
11 with our assessment schedule. Do we track the M&O
12 assessment schedule? And the answer was, yes, sir,
13 nothing was missed, let's see what this looks like.

14 And there's been an emphatic desire to get to yes
15 since the beginning of the pandemic. It was everything
16 from learning -- you recall when the pandemic started,
17 work remotely, we thought it would be impossible, yet we
18 gained all these efficiencies, right? And that's
19 something everybody is very proud of.

20 And then we started growing towards, what's the
21 future look like? So as we moved forward, we started
22 looking at how can we do assessments while we're in this
23 pandemic? And the answer was, you know, we can do a lot
24 of the work at home and then we can take opportunities
25 to be out in the field for maybe two, three, four hours,

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1 and reduce our time of exposure. Very similar to the
2 ALARA principle. As a health physicist, I'm passionate
3 about ALARA, so there was a great opportunity there
4 where I saw it being implemented in real life.

5 And so we completed all our field assessments, we
6 conducted all our operational awareness activities, we
7 completed our walkdowns. My nuclear quality engineers,
8 my weapon quality engineers conducted their required
9 QAS-4 type level reviews. My safety system oversight
10 engineers got out there in the field and looked at their
11 systems. Even my health physicists would track with the
12 M&O's radiation protection department to see how things
13 are going, still participate in the meeting and then sh
14 will come in to the field to look at postings, to look
15 at how they're doing barricades, even looked at how
16 they're monitoring exposure.

17 And then my industrial hygienist during the
18 pandemic really illuminated their role in our whole
19 lives, right? Often we're looking to them for our
20 health, too, and to watch them get engaged. And then we
21 developed ways to even shadow, and I don't want to say
22 participate in, I know they shadowed assessments that
23 were being program developed.

24 So there was an early-on commitment by this team
25 that we are going to conduct our assessments, we're

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1 still going to do our operational awareness activities,
2 and we're still going to be cognizant of what's going on
3 out in the field.

4 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Okay.

5 MR. VERDON: Sorry, if I could add one other
6 comment, just for completeness. You know, some sites
7 that did have absences in the field offices, what we
8 would do is other field services would actually provide
9 support either remotely or, you know, to fill in. If
10 somebody had to quarantine, say, and were staying home,
11 or then if worse -- if that was not available, then we
12 would provide it centrally.

13 So, again, you know, it was a sharing across the
14 entire complex to make sure that nothing was missed in
15 that regards.

16 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, sir. And
17 thank you, Mr. Armstrong, for your response as well,
18 too.

19 To you, Mr. Summers.

20 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Thank you, Ms. Roberson.

21 Mr. Armstrong, the next two questions are for
22 you, sir, and these are similar, in fact almost the
23 same, as questions we asked earlier of Mr. Budney. And
24 so the first, and both of them, frankly, have to do with
25 the facility representatives at the site. And the first

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1 has to deal with qualifying facility representatives and
2 the second has to do with the appropriate presence of
3 those facility representatives at the site.

4 So, Mr. Armstrong, sir, can you please discuss
5 any challenges with qualifying facility representatives
6 during the pandemic and how you have addressed those
7 challenges? Thank you.

8 MR. ARMSTRONG: Yes, I can. Thank you,
9 Mr. Summers, for the question.

10 This is an area I'm really excited about, because
11 we actually qualified two facility representatives
12 during the pandemic. It took a little longer than 18
13 months, I believe, but that's to be understood. It was
14 less than two years, I know that, and so I have a whole
15 cadre of four qualified facility representatives.

16 The two qualified facility representatives got
17 really engaged in helping us qualify two additional --
18 those two individuals. So it was really a unique
19 collaboration and teamwork and we had a lot of
20 independence and review and then the final signature on
21 their qualification.

22 As a previous facility representative, I take
23 that very seriously. That signature, what that means,
24 because you know that their eyes and ears, the field
25 office manager that's in the field, in some cases, some

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1 will even say the mouth, right? So I think I am very
2 near and dear to that, I am very proud that we had two
3 qualified and we have four facility representatives.

4 It wasn't any twisting of arms, saying hey, I
5 need somebody to go out there in the field. It was more
6 their raising their hand, I volunteer, I volunteer, I
7 volunteer. My assistant manager of operations had to
8 say, I want just one of you, and then we had another one
9 come in the next day, and then he stayed home and
10 another one come in the next day, and then they arranged
11 a reversal tradeoff or turnover with each other.

12 So the collaboration amongst the facility
13 representatives was really good. Near and dear to my
14 facility representatives, though, are my ES
15 professionals. As we learned throughout the whole
16 entire DOE complex through accident investigations and
17 such, the importance of our having our SMEs also in the
18 field and engaged with our facility representatives. So
19 we also worked with how we could get our health
20 physicists, our industrial hygienists, our safety
21 professionals out in the field, too, along with our
22 nuclear safety specialists and my safety system
23 oversight engineers. And the weapon quality engineers,
24 also.

25 So it was very dynamic. It wasn't twisting of

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1 arms, it wasn't forcing one of you to come in, not all
2 of you at one time, but there's an underlying need. I
3 think one of these folks want to get back together right
4 now, but right now we're cautious, but my team was able
5 to work a hybrid work environment and I really
6 appreciate that the team was able to do that through the
7 COVID pandemic and the burden that the leader feels in
8 allowing somebody to come to the office during this time
9 period. So I'm very proud of this team that they were
10 able to do this safely.

11 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Thank you, Mr. Armstrong.

12 In your description, I was thinking about one of
13 the more challenging qualification activities and that
14 is being Radiation Worker II training, which requires a
15 good bit of in-person demonstration of proficiency in
16 being able to do those tasks, or getting qualified in
17 that task. Were there any changes that you were
18 required to take in order to make sure that people
19 qualified for those similar in-person kind of
20 qualification tasks to say, rad worker II, or Radiation
21 Worker II? Thank you.

22 MR. ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Summers.

23 I began my career in DOD as a health physicist.
24 I also had a rad safety tech who ended up going back to
25 DOD. So rad worker training is near and dear to my

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1 heart. And our life flows through our rad techs in this
2 industry.

3 So, anyhow, I take rad worker training pretty
4 seriously, and I liked it a lot. There was one case
5 here, since I've been here, where I did extend a -- so
6 when M&O extends somebody for rad worker training in my
7 facilities, they have to get my approval. I recently
8 extended one, but it was after a conversation -- it was
9 the first one I had and the only one I had, and so I
10 didn't quite know the protocols, and I just wanted to do
11 a little bit more. So I brought the individual over and
12 I wanted to hear what they knew about rad protection,
13 and so I went ahead and authorized that.

14 My understanding, and I can get back to the
15 record, is our folks were able to maintain their
16 qualifications in rad worker II.

17 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Very good, thank you. And
18 we'll have our general counsel, who's recording any of
19 the questions that come up, in order to note just for
20 the record.

21 My second question, concerning also facility
22 representatives, is about, sir, can you please discuss
23 how you've determined the appropriate facility
24 representative field presence, presence in this case,
25 weighing the risk to the worker with the risk of

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1 ensuring that the contractors are performing their work
2 safely? Thanks.

3 MR. ARMSTRONG: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Summers,
4 very good question.

5 And so part of that question's answer was just
6 one piece of data. You have to look at more than one
7 piece of data. You have to look at what type of events
8 are occurring. That's what reports are for. That's
9 what assessment findings are for. Are they reactive,
10 are they proactive findings. We have to look at are
11 things happening that only reach the worker level,
12 right?

13 So when we make a decision what is the right
14 level of oversight, I start balancing all those risks, I
15 start engaging my facility representatives, asking them
16 how does our posture look right now? Are we
17 understanding what's going on out there in the field?
18 Are we having a number of TSR violations? Are we having
19 personnel contamination issues? And what's your level
20 of confidence in the site representative? Talk to me so
21 I understand.

22 Talk to your AM, who's also a qualified field
23 representative, with the understanding of what is the
24 best oversight. What does this model look like? Is
25 there night shift happening, too.

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1 And so as we went forward and started applying
2 this, we looked at all the risk tables and we came to
3 the conclusion that one full-time facility
4 representative each day is what was required, and if
5 needed, they can call in another facility
6 representative. And they also have their -- a phone
7 call away, any of our ES&H professionals who are more
8 than willing to commit.

9 I think -- so the point of your question is, a
10 series of data points and we would come to a decision in
11 our work environment, one day, for me to accept a risk
12 to exposure, and also maintain a cognizance of the
13 activities going on in the field.

14 We are fortunate here at Savannah River in that
15 we talk to the M&O every morning, and sometimes it's
16 exhausting, sometimes it's boring, but we talk every
17 morning to get an understanding of what's going on out
18 there in the field. So that's just to add value to it
19 as transparency is being shared and it's something that
20 occurs that it will be transparent. We promise not to
21 overreact, but we also want results. So --

22 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Okay. Thank you very much,
23 sir. Before I turn the floor back over to Ms. Connery,
24 I do have one comment or one question that if you would
25 be so kind as to define the acronym ALARA, which is very

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1 important for our public audience, which is also
2 watching. Thank you.

3 CHAIR CONNERY: You're on mute, sir.

4 MR. ARMSTRONG: Sorry. I said it so perfectly.
5 I said as a certified health physicist, I better get
6 this right. So as low as reasonably achievable, ALARA.
7 Thank you.

8 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Perfect. Thank you very
9 much, sir.

10 Ms. Connery, over to you, ma'am.

11 CHAIR CONNERY: Thank you. I do want to --
12 something you said earlier triggered a thought in my
13 mind when you were talking about, you know, having to
14 substitute people, and I think Dr. Verdon mentioned it
15 as well as you, Mr. Armstrong, when you needed to have
16 additional support, you were able to call on other
17 facility representatives, for instance, to do that work.

18 Given the fact that there were a lot of people
19 who were quarantined over the course of the pandemic,
20 and thinking about kind of our conversation that we're
21 going to have this afternoon with regards to the tritium
22 facility and concerns we had about like site-wide
23 evacuations, I was wondering, was there any useful
24 information or useful understanding that you got about
25 accountability during the course of COVID? In other

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1 words, across site accountability for all of your
2 workforce. That was probably something that was really
3 essential during COVID with so many people that were not
4 necessarily out because they were sick, but because they
5 had to quarantine because of who they were in contact
6 with.

7 And I was just wondering, is there a lesson
8 learned that you gained from that or was there an
9 increased ability to account for the individual workers
10 during the time frame?

11 MR. ARMSTRONG: Is that question to me,
12 Ms. Connery?

13 CHAIR CONNERY: Yes, sir.

14 MR. ARMSTRONG: Okay. I was hoping you would
15 give it to me. So through the pandemic, we were really
16 on our supervisors, the importance of communicating and
17 engagement with our team. So what happened as a result
18 of this pandemic is our supervisors, our assistant
19 managers, were having more frequent team meetings, to
20 share information, to share what's going on, keep people
21 aware what the office looks like, our future, all sorts
22 of stuff.

23 So in that period, it actually increased
24 accountability. Now it worked to a point where we were
25 almost telling folks, turn your computer off, it's 4:30,

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1 just by the clock. Go walk around a little bit. We got
2 to see hour folks who start earlier in the morning, work
3 later in the afternoon. And so that was one of the
4 other concerns, right? We had them stand up or offer to
5 stretch. We're losing that other dynamic.

6 And so accountability actually has increased from
7 the pandemic. People are --

8 CHAIR CONNERY: So I didn't mean accountability
9 in terms of whether or not they were working, I meant
10 accountability in terms of being able to literally know
11 where your people are at any given time in case of an
12 emergency.

13 MR. ARMSTRONG: I'm sorry.

14 CHAIR CONNERY: No, that's fine. That's a
15 legitimate answer as well and I do believe that there is
16 a lot of folks who are working overtime because of the
17 fact that they're they will working and working odd
18 hours, but in addition to that, because accountability
19 is important in a case of an emergency response
20 situation, in other words, understanding where your
21 personnel is at any given time, were you able to either
22 increase the fidelity of that due to COVID, or have a
23 better understanding of how that process worked within
24 your own facilities?

25 MR. ARMSTRONG: I haven't dealt in my time period

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1 here, and I can get back to you on that answer, but what
2 I'm aware of is that my AMs do know where all their
3 employees are at all times. They have their contact
4 numbers, their phone numbers, and I know where all my
5 AMs are at all the time. So it kind of rolls up.

6 CHAIR CONNERY: Okay. Acronym-free zone. AM.

7 MR. ARMSTRONG: AM, I'm sorry, yeah, so I'm the
8 manager of the office, there's a deputy manager, a DM,
9 and then there's our assistant managers, and I had
10 assistant managers. AM is an assistant manager. Thank
11 you.

12 CHAIR CONNERY: I appreciate that. We are in
13 Washington, there are acronyms, I want to make sure that
14 anybody tuning in to this can understand what it is
15 we're saying.

16 So I want to turn to my other Board members to
17 see if they have any additional questions, because I
18 know we are running short on time. So please, if you
19 have additional questions for our esteemed guests,
20 Mr. Summers, Ms. Roberson, let me know.

21 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: I do have one question.
22 I'll be brief, and I hope it's brief. You know, often
23 innovation comes from -- comes out of the necessity to
24 respond to something, and you've talked a bit about how
25 tightly you really managed the interactions, the

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1 oversight, and I guess I know you guys are working on
2 your return-to-plan work, just like the rest of us.

3 I guess I would ask you, Dr. Verdon, first, are
4 there tools or practices that were developed because of
5 COVID that you kind of said, you know, this just makes
6 sense, and you're going to -- you want to adopt longer
7 term? You want to carry over?

8 MR. VERDON: Well, I think what we identified was
9 basically different ways of accomplishing the mission
10 because of, you know, maximizing telework, and so we are
11 adapting to implement those and, you know, and to judge,
12 you know, how well we're doing in that regard. So I do
13 think, you know, we did identify new ways to accomplish
14 the missions, you know, by using, you know, virtual
15 interactions as well as more frequent, you know,
16 one-on-one interactions with, you know, the first-line
17 supervisors and things like that.

18 So we're going to continue to carry that over,
19 because I think it was beneficial. But we also learned
20 what didn't work, and we will obviously change to work
21 those things around and try to find out if we have to do
22 it through teleworking, you know, like IT, what
23 improvements in IT might be necessary, information
24 technology, desktop information technology, that might
25 be necessary to make it more efficient.

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1 So all those things are part of what we're
2 learning from this.

3 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, sir.

4 Did you want to add anything, Mr. Armstrong?

5 MR. ARMSTRONG: I think what I'll add is that as
6 we entered the pandemic, we didn't realize how
7 successful we can be with maximizing telework. And I
8 did a lot of reading for this for a whole year, I know
9 many of you have, and I speculate that our future is
10 going to be even more successful as we learn how to
11 develop and execute a hybrid work environment. I think
12 we're going to reach that perfect balance with people
13 working from home and coming to the office.

14 I'm pretty excited about that future and it's
15 something that I will be working with Dr. Verdon and his
16 entire team on moving forward, but I'm pretty excited
17 about that future. I think we're going to get more
18 innovation from folks on how to get the mission done.

19 BOARD MEMBER ROBERSON: Thank you, sir. Thank
20 you both.

21 And I don't have any additional questions,
22 Ms. Connery.

23 CHAIR CONNERY: Thank you, Ms. Roberson.

24 Mr. Summers, did you have any other questions?

25 VICE CHAIR SUMMERS: Ms. Connery, I don't have

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1 any questions. I do have a comment, and that is that I
2 really appreciate the participation of Dr. Verdon and
3 Mr. Armstrong. I really appreciate your answers and I
4 appreciate what you do for our nation. Thank you very
5 much.

6 Over to you, Ms. Connery.

7 CHAIR CONNERY: Thank you, Mr. Summers.

8 I want to echo the thanks for our panelists for
9 coming in this morning and having this conversation. I
10 do think it's an important conversation. I don't think
11 that we want to exit our COVID posture without having
12 catalogued both the lessons that we've learned, but also
13 the opportunities that we have moving forward to
14 innovate and work smarter not harder, right, as the
15 saying goes.

16 So I appreciate everybody's time this morning.
17 We are going to break here for lunch, so you all get to
18 eat, and we will come back at 1:15 to start the hearing
19 for this afternoon's session here. So we will meet
20 back, everybody, at 1:15. And to our listening and
21 viewing audience, we hope to see you back here at that
22 time. Thank you all.

23 (Whereupon, at 12:17 p.m., the meeting was
24 adjourned.)

25 CERTIFICATE OF TRANSCRIPTIONIST

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