

## Emergency Management Across the Enterprise

*By Thomas Summers, Vice Chair, Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, for the Department of Energy (DOE) and National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Emergency Management Issues Special Interest Group (EMI-SIG) Virtual Panel Discussion*

*December 13, 2023*

Good afternoon, everyone! I am delighted to be here today, in front of our emergency management experts from across the complex—wow! I have been graciously offered the opportunity to provide a few brief remarks today to open this panel discussion of experts, which I am excited to see.

Over the past two years, I have had the great pleasure of visiting sites, observing exercises, and interacting with many of you. My understanding and appreciation for your work, and the importance of your work, has grown with every opportunity I've taken to visit. I have relayed my appreciation to many in DOE and NNSA's senior management, including Secretary Granholm herself. The work you do is important, and I wanted to share with you today a few of my thoughts on why your work is absolutely vital to the nation.

Emergency management professionals, like all of you, play key roles in safety. Safety, in turn, is how we accomplish our missions that are crucial for the safety and security of our nation and the world.

Speaking as a member of a safety board, we try to do everything in our power to prevent an emergency from ever occurring.

But we, here, are all in very special lines of work. The work we do, and the materials and processes involved – whether radiological, chemical, or biological – all pose inherent risks to both health and safety *and* to the continuity of our important national missions. We can manage these risks, but so long as hazards exist, we can never eliminate these risks.

That is why DOE and NNSA's emergency preparedness and response programs are vitally important to our safety and security. You, each of you, are our nations and the world's last line of defense against the worst days we can imagine. And being the **last** line of defense requires being on the **front** lines of preparing and planning.

These are challenges that few in the world, **we** merry few, will ever know or understand. But know it well you **must**, and you **do**!

As I mentioned a moment ago, I have been humbled to have had the opportunity to see many of you and your colleagues in action. I wanted to recognize a few standout moments for me.

First, at Y-12, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, and the Sandia National Laboratory in New Mexico, I've had the opportunity to see the new emergency operations centers. Two of those I got to see in action during an exercise. At Y-12, no less impressive than their new EOC was their brand new fire station, which I also had the chance to tour. These are incredible facilities that will serve their sites and surrounding communities for decades to come.

Second, out at Hanford and the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, I observed the response to one of the most challenging nuclear criticality accident scenarios I've ever heard of. If you're thinking about writing a nuclear criticality accident scenario for your site soon, I'd encourage you to talk to PNNL about what they did and learned.

Third, I've been impressed by the effort and coordination that goes into some of the wider-scale demonstrations of protective actions and accountability of site workforce. This summer, I observed Lawrence Livermore demonstrate a shelter-in-place for its entire site for 15 minutes, with controllers positioned around the site to assess how well the instructions were heeded. Last year, I watched the Savannah River Site exercise not just its Tritium Facilities, but protective actions for the surrounding H-Area as well. A few months ago, the WIPP site practiced a site-wide take cover during its annual exercise. And of course, earlier this year, Y-12 demonstrated real-world evacuations of nuclear facilities and learned some valuable lessons I hope everyone has had a chance to learn from. There are many more examples of this happening – these were just some that came first to mind. I understand that including the broader workforce is hard to coordinate, is unpopular and disruptive to work, and is rarely pretty. But, from my point of view, making the effort to have your workforce demonstrate these actions is absolutely, 100% worth it, and I try to make sure site management understands this. You can have great plans on paper, but when it comes to emergencies, people will respond as they've practiced. Which is why it's important that they practice, and which is why I wanted to commend efforts like these.

Everywhere I went throughout the Defense Nuclear Complex, I observed a high level of engagement and commitment from emergency management professionals—that's all of you!

And while you can expect the Board and our dedicated staff will continue to perform safety oversight and provide feedback to the Department, I wanted to

acknowledge the **immense** challenges you face every day and the incredible dedication and professionalism I've witnessed. The hazards you plan for and respond to will continue to change and the people who do the work will come and go. The outstanding programs you are building, the lives you will protect, the accidents you will mitigate, and the assurances you provide to your communities, will outlast us all.

So, I am absolutely thrilled to be here today to listen to our excellent speakers, and to hear the different perspectives on where we are and where we're going together as independent safety partners laser focused on safe mission accomplishment. Thank you!