

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

January 19, 2018

MEMORANDUM FOR: S.A. Stokes, Technical Director
FROM: J.W. Plaue and D. Gutowski
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Activity Report for Week Ending January 19, 2018

Federal Oversight. NNSA provided the LANL contractor with the fiscal year 2017 Performance Evaluation Report. The report notes successes in areas such as treatment of remediated nitrate salt waste, stockpile modernization, and restart of activities at the Plutonium Facility. Performance weaknesses included issues with procedure compliance, a negative trend in the source of reporting for criticality safety infractions, and a disconnect between causal analyses and corrective actions.

At the direction of NNSA Headquarters, the NNSA Field Office Manager, the Deputy Manager for Technical Operations, and the Assistant Manager for Mission Assurance and Infrastructure recently opened second offices in the LANL contractor's main administration building. The intent of the move is to improve partnering with the LANL contractor; however, field office management is mindful of the need to continue a strong presence with the federal staff in support of their oversight role.

Plutonium Facility–Equipment Deactivation. Last Wednesday, Plutonium Facility personnel attempted to transfer about 60 liters of a legacy nitric acid solution with a low plutonium concentration out of tanks in a glovebox slated for removal. This material was not drained and flushed following completion of programmatic activities in this room more than ten years ago. The transfer did not arrive at the receiving tank, and the majority of the material remains held-up in the transfer line. Facility personnel believe that the most likely problem was insufficient vacuum to lift the dense solution into the receiving tanks. This Thursday, they started evaluating options for recovery. Vacuum systems and water addition capability were removed from this area prior to the attempt at draining the solution making recovery more challenging. DOE guidance on deactivation and decommissioning processes notes that support and utility systems should remain in operating condition if they may be required during the disposition phase.

Transuranic Waste Facility–Safety Basis. Last month, LANL management submitted to the NNSA Field Office a project execution plan for the reclassification of the fire suppression system (FSS) to safety significant. The plan responds to a condition of approval that requires the submission of a safety basis change to support the reclassifying the FSS within six months of the start of operations. Additionally, the NNSA Cognizant Secretarial Officer caveated his previous approval with the intent to re-evaluate approval if the safety significant FSS was not fully implemented by February 28, 2018. The plan's schedule indicates a period of comment iteration with the NNSA Field Office beginning in February with approval projected for April 26 and subsequent implementation on July 26, 2018. On Thursday, the NNSA Field Office Manager approved the safety basis review plan for this submittal. Notably, the review plan includes the participation of three personnel from external NNSA entities. This safety basis submission has the potential to address many of the concerns communicated in the Board's letter dated November 9, 2017.