

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

August 10, 2018

MEMORANDUM FOR: Christopher J. Roscetti, Technical Director
FROM: J.W. Plaue and D. Gutowski, Resident Inspectors
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Activity Report for Week Ending August 10, 2018

Plutonium Facility–Emergency Management: On Monday and Wednesday, Plutonium Facility and emergency response personnel held hot-washes to review and learn from the response to last week’s potentially smoking container (see 8/3/2018 report). Key points that emerged from these discussions include: (1) the container involved originated in the late 2016 to mid-2017 timeframe and held waste debris from the plutonium-238 aqueous scrap recovery line, including a clump of degraded absorbent wipes; however, further information characterizing the contents is limited due to the lack of logs; (2) operations and waste management personnel assessed the container for disposal last Wednesday at which time they first observed the smoke/dust phenomenon, including at least one worker reporting the container to be warm to the touch; they informed line management on their observations, but not facility management or fire protection experts; (3) additional personnel observed the container on Thursday and conservatively concluded the phenomenon was smoke, at which time they contacted the operations center for guidance and were instructed to pull the fire alarm (similar to last month’s event, see 7/20/2018 report); and (4) the fire department’s current technology is insufficiently sensitive for heat-sensing applications inside gloveboxes; consequently, the determination that the situation was stable relied upon the observation that tape on the metal container had not degraded. The suspect container has been moved to an inert glovebox and management is developing corrective actions. The Resident Inspectors also note the many gloveboxes in the facility, including the one used to open the suspect container, await completion of fire hazard evaluations to determine the need for additional automatic or manual fire suppression capability (see 12/22/2017 report).

Plutonium Facility–Housekeeping: Plutonium Facility personnel recently completed an inventory. As part of the inventory, NNSA management requested extensive housekeeping activities that generated about 85 waste drums and about 24 other containers. This housekeeping activity improved the overall safety posture of the facility, particularly given that a large fraction of this waste represented unnecessary combustible materials that had been staged inside glovebox lines.

Plutonium Facility–Safety Basis: Laboratory personnel continue executing their New Information process on the question of plutonium-238 biokinetic solubility (see 7/20/2018 report).

Safety Systems: Last week, the NNSA Field Office issued their assessment report on diesel generator emergency and standby power systems at several of the nuclear facilities. They identified five findings, 13 observations, and one noteworthy practice. Findings of note include: (1) several work packages were considered complete despite incomplete performance of work steps and (2) in each case reviewed, diesel generator maintenance had not been identified, scheduled, and/or completed in accordance with NFPA 110 recommendations and LANL internal requirements. The field office requested issues management documentation within 15 days.

RANT Shipping Facility: Last Friday, the LANL contractor submitted the fourth quarter Startup Notification Report to the NNSA Field Office. The proposed restart date for the RANT Shipping Facility has been delayed from December 2018 to September 2019 (see 7/13/2018 report).