

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

January 18, 2019

MEMORANDUM FOR: Christopher J. Roscetti, Technical Director
FROM: J.W. Plaue and D. Gutowski, Resident Inspectors
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Activity Report for Week Ending January 18, 2019

Plutonium Facility–Issue Recurrence: On Monday, facility management entered a limiting condition for operations after system engineers performing a surveillance determined that conflats containers were incorrectly listed in the tracking system as a type certified to reduce the damage ratio in certain accident scenarios. This issue is similar to a previous occurrence that prompted considerable corrective actions that apparently were not fully effective (see 4/25/2015 and 11/6/2015 reports). For this instance, management elected to reinforce awareness of certified container types in upcoming briefings and study whether container names or types could be further refined to reduce error traps for the workforce.

Area G: Repairs to the out of service safety class vehicle barriers (see 11/2/2018 report) are on hold pending procurement of additional wire cabling. As the planned vendor is not Nuclear Quality Assurance-1 qualified, N3B personnel are developing a commercial grade dedication package and Technical Evaluation Acceptance Plan to ensure the procured cabling will meet safety class quality assurance requirements.

On Tuesday, N3B requested another one time variance to allow snow removal equipment into the area where vehicles are restricted. The controls are the same from last week. The variance was not used as the snow melted prior to approval from the EM Field Office. Of note, this variance explicitly noted that any violations of the controls would be equivalent to a violation of the technical safety requirements.

Waste Characterization Reduction and Repackaging Facility: On Thursday, facility management entered the New Information process after reviewing results of non-destructive assay measurements. The measurements, performed in late November 2018, indicate the possibility that a 55-gallon drum placed in an 85-gallon drum currently located within the glovebox enclosure may contain materials that exceed the radionuclide limit for transuranic waste, a condition that is prohibited by the safety basis. However, this determination is difficult because the measurement uncertainty and possibility that the radionuclides are actually associated residual contamination in the enclosure (the safety basis assumes that the residual contamination levels are less than 10 percent of the Hazard Category 3 limit). Based on anecdotal reports and visual confirmation, the nested drums have been in their present location for at least 20 years, do not have their lids, and contain vermiculite and plastics materials possibly associated with previous cleanup attempts of a nearby hydrocarbon spill. The facility remains in COLD STANDBY mode and management initiated planning for improved radiological characterization of the enclosure and the drum. The overall future of the facility remains under study.

Weapons Engineering Tritium Facility: Last Friday, the NNSA Field Office approved the annual update for the safety basis. This annual update was intended to consolidate previously approved changes into one document. NNSA included one condition of approval which directed incorporation of open comments from their review of this revision be incorporated in the next annual update.