

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

October 30, 2020

TO: Christopher J. Roscetti, Technical Director
FROM: Miranda McCoy, Resident Inspector
SUBJECT: Pantex Plant Activity Report for Week Ending October 30, 2020

Inclement Weather: Pantex and the surrounding communities experienced snowfall and icy conditions much of this week, resulting in the National Weather Service issuing several winter storm warnings. The inclement weather caused partial power outages at Pantex. Onsite non-essential operations were halted Monday through Thursday, and resumed Friday.

Emergency Management: The number of COVID-19 cases in the Amarillo area and among Pantex employees continues to increase. A limited emergency response organization continues to monitor the situation and work through a number of action items, including reviewing the current COVID-19 controls in common areas. Due to the COVID-19 case rate, CNS emergency management elected to delay a full-scale emergency exercise originally planned for early November. CNS previously completed two emergency exercises this year: a tabletop in January and a full-scale exercise—but non-contamination event—in August (see 1/10/20 and 8/21/20 reports). The planned exercise was much more ambitious in scope and would involve significant site and offsite involvement.

Immediate Action Procedures: Earlier this month, production technicians (PT) and their first line supervisor entered immediate action procedures following an unexpected reading from an electrical test of one unit (see 10/23/20 report). Tester design personnel verified that the cause of the failed test was an issue with the tester cable itself. CNS process engineering personnel published a nuclear explosive engineering procedure (NEEP) to allow PTs to continue the electrical testing from the point of the unexpected reading with a different copy of the tester and cable. PTs completed testing operations per the NEEP this week with no issue.

Tripping Technician Model: NNSA Central Technical Authority (CTA) concurred with NPO and CNS's current approach to analyzing the tripping technician hazard at the Pantex Plant. In a memorandum to NPO, CTA outlined the history of the tripping technician hazard, various attempts to better characterize or resolve the hazards, and a number of controls CNS currently implements to prevent or mitigate specific tripping technician scenarios. The memorandum concludes that moving resources off further efforts to characterize tripping technician hazards and onto other safety basis issues (e.g., electrostatic discharge and high explosive sensitivity research) is consistent with NNSA governance philosophy, and that CTA believes Pantex's current approach for tripping technician hazards is conservative and adequate. The memorandum additionally notes that an open nuclear explosive safety finding associated with tripping technician hazards requires NPO closure.