

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

April 29, 2022

MEMORANDUM FOR: Christopher J. Roscetti, Technical Director
FROM: D. Gutowski and J. Plaue, Resident Inspectors
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Activity Report for Week Ending April 29, 2022

Wildland Fire: Last Friday, during an epic high wind event, a fire of unknown origin started west of the laboratory in the Jemez Mountains. The fire, designated the Cerro Pelado Fire, has since grown to more than 7,000 acres and is approximately 10 miles from the laboratory. Much of the land between the active fire and the lab is filled with burn scars from the 2011 Las Conchas fire. Triad Emergency Management personnel are monitoring the situation and plan to activate the Emergency Operations Center if conditions deteriorate indicating a threat to laboratory property. Currently, the main impact to laboratory operations is degraded air quality.

Plutonium Facility–Infrastructure: On Thursday, Triad personnel successfully removed an unused glovebox from a laboratory room in the Plutonium Facility. The box had never been used, and all radiological swipes were clean. It was removed without incident. The box is currently staged in the basement awaiting clearance to be removed from the facility. Once removed, it will be repurposed for training personnel in deactivation and decommissioning activities.

Emergency Management: Last week, during a planned chemical cleanup activity at the Technical Area 48 Radiochemistry Facility, workers identified an unsealed bottle of uninhibited tetrahydrofuran, a peroxide-forming chemical. Workers did not observe any visible crystal formation; however, they tested the bottle with test strips and determined it contained peroxides. They segregated the bottle in the corner of fume hood behind a blast shield and informed the hazardous materials team. The team responded and performed a controlled destruction of the reagent bottle in a containment vessel without incident.

Federal Oversight: Recently, the NNSA Field Office leadership has made a concerted effort to increase oversight staffing to support pit production and other priority mission increases at the laboratory. They recently hired individuals to fill roles as facility representatives, nuclear safety specialists, and maintenance managers. They are working to get these new staff fully qualified for their roles. In the past two weeks, three individuals completed final oral boards: one facility representative for the Los Alamos Neutron Science Center, one facility representative for the Science and Technology Operations facilities, and one maintenance manager who will focus on nuclear facilities other than the Plutonium Facility.

The Environmental Management Field Office leadership is also working to increase staffing and recently hired a nuclear safety specialist. Their direct field oversight, which has four authorized positions for facility representatives, is currently staffed at one fully qualified facility representative and one facility representative in training. Two technical assist contractors provide support to the federal personnel.