

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

November 24, 2023

TO: Timothy J. Dwyer, Acting Technical Director
FROM: D. Gutowski, Resident Inspector
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Activity Report for the Week Ending November 24, 2023

Staff Activity: D. Gutowski was offsite this week. M. Bradisse provided coverage remotely.

Area G–Stop Work: While performing an extent of condition review on operational record keeping practices for contact-handled transuranic waste operations at Area G, an N3B team discovered that records management was not in compliance with expectations laid out in the contractor’s policy. The team found that completed pre-job and post-job paperwork was of inconsistent quality and was not regularly undergoing a quality review process, that training and qualification paperwork for individuals performing work was difficult to trace, and that general understanding of expectations for records management was poor. Consequently, N3B management stopped work at Area G. This is the latest in a series of work stoppages at Area G related to deficiencies in paperwork, training, and qualification (see 11/4/2023 report). The team is finalizing a list of findings from the assessment and will develop corrective actions needed to resume work.

Plutonium Facility–Safety Basis: Last Wednesday, the NNSA Field Office approved the evaluation of the safety of the situation (ESS) pertaining to the positive unreviewed safety question for future mission work involving receipt and processing of large shipments of heat source plutonium (see 7/28, 9/1/2023 reports). However, the approval letter noted that the ESS’s operational restriction was vague since it did not clearly specify the affected area of the Plutonium Facility, or that Field Office concurrence would be required prior to introducing this heat source material into any glovebox. The approval therefore included one directed change to clarify these points.

The ESS resolves a discrepancy identified during readiness activities regarding the allowable material at risk (MAR) in a glovebox during these operations by proposing an operational restriction aligned with the lower of two potential MAR values. That lower MAR value corresponded to the dose consequences reported in the initial safety basis addendum. However, the ESS stated that a revised safety basis addendum would be submitted to allow the higher of the two MAR values. The revised addendum, submitted in early September, proposes a further increase in MAR, so it will also need to be approved by NNSA headquarters, as it will involve accepting additional risk to the public on top of the risk already accepted.

Plutonium Facility–Decontamination and Decommissioning: During a walkdown last week, the resident inspectors observed the conditions of an in-progress job to remove a large glovebox from the facility. This glovebox was large enough that it required multiple in-situ cuts to fit it through the laboratory doors. To perform this work, laboratory personnel erected a floor-to-ceiling contamination control tent, which allows the facility fire suppression system to maintain coverage within the tent. They performed the cuts with a method new to the Plutonium Facility. As of last week, the cuts have been performed, the portion of the glovebox to be removed has been wrapped and prepared for removal from the laboratory room, and the opening to the remaining glovebox line has been secured with a metal plate to maintain confinement. The resident inspectors also observed the condition of a smaller box in a different room that had recently been disconnected and was wrapped awaiting removal and identified a contamination control tent in the basement supporting a pump removal that was in disrepair.