

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

January 5, 2024

TO: Katherine R. Herrera, Acting Technical Director
FROM: D. Gutowski, Resident Inspector
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Activity Report for the Week Ending January 5, 2024

Area G–Safety Basis: On Tuesday, the Environmental Management Field Office and Headquarters approved the annual update to the Area G Basis for Interim Operations. Additionally, N3B submitted an extension request for the five Justifications for Continued Operations (JCOs) to February 28, 2025, which is currently undergoing DOE review for approval. The five JCOs have been in place since 2021 and cover a variety of topics from the numerous potential inadequacies of the safety analysis identified that year (see 9/3, 10/5, 10/29/2021 reports). DOE guidance recommends JCOs last no longer than 12 months, at which point they should be incorporated into the permanent facility safety basis. These JCO's have been extended to focus efforts on developing a modern documented safety analysis to serve as the safety basis for Area G. DOE's letter states that they are receptive to another extension on the condition that the JCOs will be incorporated into this new safety basis. The new safety basis is expected to be submitted for approval in March of this year with a goal of full implementation before the end of the fiscal year.

Plutonium Facility–Safety Basis: On Thursday, Triad safety basis personnel resubmitted a safety basis page change that would expand the types of allowable activities during limited operations mode at the Plutonium Facility. The driver for this change is to allow more flexibility for removing or installing equipment. Entry into limited operations mode is usually driven by incomplete functionality of credited safety systems (whether planned or unplanned) as defined in the facility's limiting conditions for operations. Therefore, only activities with limited risk are allowed. The NNSA Field Office did not approve the first version of this change last November. The Field Office expressed concerns in its response that there was not adequate detail regarding the justification for new types of activities and the specifics defining the risk threshold for those activities. The new submittal is intended to address these concerns.

Plutonium Facility–Readiness: At the end of last month, Triad requested the NNSA Field Office approve its corrective action plan from the contractor readiness assessment for resumption of aqueous nitrate operations (see 5/5/2023 report). Triad personnel performed causal analyses for each of the five pre-start and three post-start findings from the assessment to develop the suite of corrective actions. Actions affiliated with pre-start findings are either complete or scheduled for completion next week. NNSA personnel are reviewing these submittals and plan to start a federal readiness assessment at the end of January.

Continuous Improvement: The resident inspector met with the Triad Operational Performance Assurance manager to discuss initiatives to improve operations in the Weapons Production and Plutonium Infrastructure directorates.

Weather Impacts: A winter storm impacted laboratory operations with delayed openings on Thursday and Friday.