

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

June 7, 2024

TO: Timothy J. Dwyer, Technical Director
FROM: D. Gutowski, Resident Inspector
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Activity Report for the Week Ending June 7, 2024

Staff Activity: C. Jones, Y-12 resident inspector, was onsite to benchmark oversight approaches.

Area G–Emergency Response: On Wednesday, Area G experienced a power loss. Concurrent with the power loss, operations center personnel received multiple reports of smoke. The power failure was caused by a bird interacting with a power pole on the north side of Area G. Responding fire department personnel extinguished a small brush fire just south of Area G. This appeared to have been caused by a damaged fuse, which was likely related to the power fluctuations at the other pole where sparking did not initiate a fire. N3B personnel were performing size reduction of corrugated metal pipes in the Dome 375 PermaCon during the power loss. The PermaCon lost lighting and ventilation. All workers were able to exit safely. Radiological control personnel surveyed them at a muster area and found no contamination on these workers. Follow-up surveys in Dome 375 found no contamination spread from the PermaCon following the ventilation loss. Triad linemen restored power to Area G in approximately two hours. The RANT Shipping Facility, which is also in Technical Area 54, did not lose power. While the response to this event went well with no injuries, rapid extinguishing of the fire, and no contamination spread, N3B personnel identified weaknesses in the response, especially with communications. They are evaluating additional backup power for the Operations Center, and more use of radios or a phone tree to improve emergency communications. On Thursday, the wildland fire danger rating for the lab elevated to very high due to hot and dry weather conditions with erratic winds.

Plutonium Facility–Radiological Control: Last Wednesday, there was a skin contamination event in the Plutonium Facility. Two workers were performing a walkdown to support isolating water from the decontamination shower that overflowed and spread contamination in March (see 3/15/2024 report). One worker inadvertently touched the grate over the shower drain without gloves while kneeling. Both workers alarmed contamination monitoring equipment while attempting to exit the facility. The worker who touched the grate had skin contamination on the hand while the other worker had personal protective equipment contamination. Radiological control technicians successfully decontaminated the individual. Facility management plans to improve radiological postings for drains and provide training on this event at an upcoming routine safety pause.

Plutonium Facility–Safety Basis: Last Wednesday, while performing an in-service inspection of safety-significant fissile material transfer carts, workers identified a cart with unapproved wheels. These carts' safety function is to stay upright during a seismic event when holding fissile material. There is no analysis supporting use of other types of wheels, and there is no record of an authorized repair order for this cart. The cart has been taken out of service and the in-service inspection for all carts is being completed to ensure no other carts have been modified. Facility management also plans to adjust the postings on these safety-significant carts to make them more distinct from the many non-credited carts in the facility.