DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

November 21, 2003

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. Kent Fortenberry, Technical Director
FROM: C. H. Keilers, Jr.
SUBJECT: Los Alamos Report for Week Ending November 21, 2003

Integrated Safety Management: LANL continues to make progress on implementing interim work control improvements, to be completed by January 1st. This is a difficult, large-scale task that has required many activities to stop work until their work definition, hazard analyses, controls, and authorizations have been updated. To facilitate this effort, the NNSA Site Office and LANL have jointly established six "technical assist" teams that will engage during the next few weeks at the facility or construction project level with four objectives: (1) identify course corrections now; (2) ensure consistent implementation across LANL; (3) provide assistance in the field; and (4) provide feedback for the longer term improvements.

While the site rep agrees this warrants high priority, the site rep is concerned that NNSA has staffed these teams by pulling nearly two-thirds of the NNSA facility reps (FRs) out of their facilities (e.g., CMR, WETF, Waste Operations, DAHRT, Radiography Facility). This is clearly a relative-risk decision. The NNSA Site Office is not staffed for this function. While successfully implementing interim controls will reduce risk, the FRs play a key role in other risk reduction activities. In the past, the FR Program here has been one of the mostly timely and effective mechanisms in bringing safety issues to the attention of NNSA and LANL senior management.

Plutonium Facility (TA-55): This week, TA-55 completed the assessment phase (phase 1) for recovering the Pu-238 contaminated room. TA-55 plans to next begin room decontamination (phase 3) after necessary controls are in place, followed by interim repackaging and storage (phase 2).

Emergency Preparedness: On Wednesday, a local phone company equipment failure degraded off-site and some on-site communications for several hours, including off-site communications to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The site rep understands that local 911 service was available but also degraded. Some nuclear facilities rely on 911 service as a compensatory measure for weaknesses in the site-wide fire alarm system (site rep weekly 1/17/03). This week's event appears worthy of exploring for lessons learned.

Feedback and Improvement: In the last year, LANL has significantly improved both self-reporting and verifiable closure of safety issues in nuclear facilities via the Price Anderson Program. The number of Price Anderson reviews is up for 2003 compared to previous years (14 % more than 2002, 56 % more than 2001). This appears due to better reporting and not to an increase in problems, based on a comparison to other measures (e.g., ORPS). The problems existed before. Now their visibility to NNSA and LANL management has increased. Similarly, the NNSA and LANL closure process for these issues is more rigorous than in the past and under better control by senior management.

Quality Assurance (QA): This week, an NNSA team assessed how well the NNSA Los Alamos Site Office (LASO) has established and implemented key QA program elements and conducts oversight on LANL QA. Based on their preliminary conclusions and on other observations, the site rep believes that LASO is making progress but still lacks a formal, well-defined QA Program. LASO has elements of a program. Areas for improvement might include documents and record management (e.g., both operations and authorization basis approval records); issues management; self-assessments; lessons-learned. LASO is increasing QA staffing and is committed to issuing shortly a quality assurance plan (now draft) and a Functions, Responsibilities, and Authority Manual.