DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

February 16, 2001

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. K. Fortenberry, Technical Director
FROM: H. Waugh and W. White, Pantex Site Representatives
SUBJECT: Pantex Plant Activity Report for Week Ending February 16, 2001

DNFSB Activity Summary: H. Waugh was on site all week. W. White was on site Monday and Tuesday and at the Savannah River Site for the remainder of the week. Tom Burns was at Pantex Wednesday and Thursday to observe the pit management meeting and to tour sealed-insert repackaging facilities.

Pit Management Meeting: DOE and contractor personnel met this week to discuss the current status of the pit repackaging program. Over the past year, upgrades and optimizations have increased the production efficiency of the pit repackaging line significantly. BWXT personnel indicated that, based on a recent optimization study, even further gains may be achievable in the near term. The increased production efficiency may expedite the achievement of the 200 pit per month production rate discussed in the Implementation Plan for Recommendation 99-1. However, as the repackaging rate increases, it will become even more imperative that DOE provide requisite container procurement funds in a timely fashion to keep production lines from shutting down. Funding for the next container procurement lot (1400 containers) must be received by April 2001 to avoid a process interruption.

Other lingering issues were also discussed that present potential risks to the pit repackaging effort: Building 12-116 storage modifications, pit cleaning station development, AL-R8 sealed-insert 2040 container development, and disposition of W54 pits. Of particular concern are the W54 pits. It was agreed that measures necessary to get these pits into sealed-insert containers should be expedited. Further consideration may be warranted for disposition at the LANL Special Recovery Line. [II.A]

W87 Tester Change Control: During disassembly processing of a W87, a weapon component failed a required electrical test. The precise condition of the component could not be conclusively determined by radiography. Although the safe state of the W87 was validated through the radiographs, the design agency has requested that additional electrical tests be performed on the W87 unit to further evaluate the status of the component. A local nuclear explosive safety review of the proposed tests concluded that the tests are not trivial. Approval by the DOE Albuquerque Nuclear Explosive Safety Program is required. The proposed tests involve a single nuclear explosive tester (PT 4030) already approved for use on the W87 program. The proposed tests involve the use of this tester over various test ranges to determine the exact state of the component in question. The proposed tests appear to violate a general nuclear explosive safety rule which prohibits electrical trouble shooting on nuclear explosives. [II.A]

W76 Disassembly and Inspection Operations: A modified vacuum lifting fixture received final approval and was used in the completion of W76 disassembly operations. This allows normal W76 disassembly and inspection operations to resume. W76 disassembly and inspection operations had been temporarily interrupted since the W76 cell (which is authorized for only one unit at a time) was occupied by the nuclear explosive package which required the modified tool for completion of disassembly. [II.A]