

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

February 19, 1999

TO: G. W. Cunningham, Technical Director

FROM: M. T. Sautman

SUBJECT: RFETS Activity Report for Week Ending February 19, 1999

Facility Representatives (FR). As discussed in weekly reports last Fall, the Site Rep has been concerned with how much time FRs and other RFFO field assessment personnel were spending in plutonium facilities performing walkdowns and observing work. The Site Rep received computerized radiation work permit (RWP) login data for October 1998 through January 1999 and compared it with earlier data. The good news is that the monthly average for RWP logins significantly increased (usually 50-200%) for every B707/776/779 and B771 FR. However, on an absolute basis, FRs are still averaging only a little more than 1 RWP login a week. With the exception of 2 FRs, the other FRs are coming nowhere close to the expectation that they spend 40% of their time in the field. The FRs spending the least amount of time in the field are the 3 FR team leaders whose monthly averages ranged between 1 and 3.8 entries. The Site Rep's monthly average still exceeds the majority of FRs even though the Site Rep was out of town 4 weeks during the 4-month period examined and his average excludes his entries into B779 (which is done manually).

The Site Rep met with Mike Weis, the Assistant Manager for Field and Performance Assessment, to discuss his group's recent reorganization. One positive issue is that the FR Nuclear Operations Team includes some of the FRs with the highest monthly RWP login averages. The Transition and Demolition Activities teams have a mixture of the remaining FRs and subject matter experts. Based on Site Rep observations and RWP login data, the field presence by RFFO health physicists and occupational safety personnel has improved, but could still be much better. RFFO has recently posted for two additional health physicists, which should help.

Oral Boards. For the past 1½ years, the Site Rep has been attending most of the shift manager (SM), shift technical advisor (STA), and configuration control authority (CCA) oral boards. The Site Rep considers these to be critical positions since these individuals are initially responsible for incident command in an accident. The concerns with these boards have been documented in several weekly reports. Although the Site Rep has discussed oral board problems with senior managers in the past, the Site Rep has recently been making this a higher priority issue in recent discussions with Steve Polston, Carl Cox, and George Jackson. These managers have now taken a personal interest in the oral boards and are starting to fix the problems. After some delays, K-H finally issued more rigorous oral board guidelines and requirements. K-H incorporated many of the Site Rep's suggestions related to grading protocols to avoid biasing the results, qualification of board members, automatic failure criteria, use of reference material, question topics, and length of the board. Although many of these suggestions are common sense, they needed to be stated explicitly because of past problems that have

occurred. The guidelines now allow K-H and DOE to have a voting member on the board if needed, which should encourage the subcontractors to improve the quality of their boards. The guidelines are an improvement, but not the entire solution.

Last Friday, Carl Cox (SSOC President) observed a B707 oral board. After just an hour, the board members decided to stop the board because of weak performance. This was somewhat surprising since the Site Rep has observed worse boards in B707 that were not suspended and resulted in the candidate passing. In fact, this was the first board the Site Rep can remember in which 1 (maybe 2) of the B707 board members ever failed a candidate. Steve Polston also indicated a desire to observe a board, but B707 decided to delay that board so that the candidate could prepare some more. Evidently, facility management realizes that a higher standard is now expected.

The SSOC Operations Support manager also concluded that several improvements need to be made to the SM/STA/CCA training program and oral board process, which is now her top priority. SSOC plans to review the qualification package, make the written tests harder, improve the approval process for the qualification requirements, and develop a continuing training program. As for the oral boards, SSOC plans to improve the preparation for the boards, develop pass/fail criteria, and develop criteria for board members. The Site Rep is supportive of both K-H's and SSOC's initiatives. The Site Rep hopes that RMRS also takes some action because B771's oral boards are the weakest.

Recommendation 94-1. Cementation of ion exchange resin residues in the B774 Bottle Box was completed. This was several weeks ahead of the March 1999 milestone. DOE-HQ also issued the second residue Record of Decision (ROD). This ROD covers the processing (if necessary) and repacking of several residue categories (e.g., salts, ash, sludges) and their disposal at WIPP.

Interactions with the Public. The Site Rep and the Technical Director met with representatives of Sen. Allard, Rep. Udall, and the Governor's office this week to discuss safety issues at RFETS.

cc: Board members