

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

March 5, 1999

TO: G. W. Cunningham, Technical Director

FROM: M. T. Sautman

SUBJECT: RFETS Activity Report for Week Ending March 5, 1999

Recommendation 94-1. Disassembly of the plutonium packaging system, currently at an off-site warehouse, began this week. The equipment should start arriving in B371 later this month.

SSOC has provided their resolution to the technical staff's comments on the residue characterization reports. The staff will be working with RFETS to make sure the comments are addressed.

Work Control. When piping is being cut as part of process piping removal in B771, vacuum is provided to the piping from two directions. Recently workers decided to change one of the vacuum sources without their foreman's knowledge and without updating the Integrated Work Control Package. During the subsequent valve lineup, they forgot to open a valve. This resulted in no vacuum being provided from one direction. Another foreman discovered the situation and stopped the evolution. Luckily, this was a reagent system rather than an actinide one. Otherwise, there could have been an increased chance of releasing contamination.

Residue Storage. K-H has proposed storing pipe overpack containers (POC) at the 750 and 904 Pads. These are asphalt-paved areas with tent structures that currently only store low-level waste. The proposal would allow only transuranic waste in POCs to be stored at the pads; no opening of the POC would be allowed. The POCs would contain repacked residues (e.g., ash and salt) that are limited to 200 grams plutonium and 1225 grams weapons grade Pu-equivalent (i.e., Pu + Am-241). The Site Rep has reviewed how the proposal addresses potential accident scenarios. This is an issue where our oversight overlaps CDPHE's. The Site Rep has discussed the proposal with CDPHE personnel who will be deciding the permit storage requirements.

Glovebox Gloves. For the last month or so, there have been more glovebox glove holes than normal. This has resulted in several potential intakes. In a couple cases, contamination was spread to as many as 16 other gloves before the contamination release was detected. There does not appear to be a single cause for the holes; rather, it might be a combination of glove age, glove wear, and operator use of tools. SSOC is reviewing glove procurement, storage, testing and use to identify the cause(s) for the holes.

Meeting with Union. Since many of the staff's recent efforts have concerned worker protection and work control issues, the Site Rep has been making an increased effort to invite union representatives to staff meetings and discuss their concerns. The Site Rep met with Jerry Harden, the President of the Steelworkers' Union, this week to get his opinion on recent proposals. Other concerns discussed were recent initiatives to use only lab coats and gloves when working in gloveboxes in radiation buffer areas and waivers to exceed administrative control limits.

cc: Board members