



Intranet Home

- [NNSA Information](#)
- [Press Releases](#)
- [Reports and Manuals](#)
- [Lintgrams](#)
- [NNSACAST HQ](#)
- [NNSA Policy Letters](#)
- [Supplemental Directives](#)
- [Newsletters](#)
- [Fact Sheets](#)
- [Speeches](#)
- [Technical Bulletin](#)
- [Informative Websites](#)

HQ Intranet Sites

- [Defense Programs Nuclear Facilities QA](#)
- [Defense Nuclear Security](#)
- [HQ Security Office](#)
- [HQ Human Resources](#)
- [Learning Resource Center](#)
- [Flexiplace](#)
- [Project Mgmt & Systems Support \(NA-54\)](#)
- [Planning, Programming, Budgeting & Evaluation](#)
- [webPMIS \(NA-22\)](#)
- [Export Control Policy and Cooperation \(NA-243\)](#)
- [Weapons Labs Institutional Plans](#)
- [Ombuds Program](#)

NNSA Of The Future

- [Implementation Documents](#)
- [Job Opportunities](#)
- [NNSA Service Center](#)
- [NNSA Career Transition](#)

NNSA Public Sites

- [NNSA Home Page](#)

Lintgram #59

Created by Ambassador Linton F. Brooks on October 30, 2006 Submitted on Monday, October 30, 2006 3:49 PM

As you can tell from reading the papers and watching the news, this has been a very busy time for many of us. We have had an extremely serious security breach at one of our laboratories. Because there is an ongoing law enforcement investigation, I don't want to provide a lot of details. While the Secretary and I are expecting the laboratory to take the lead in identifying and correcting any weaknesses, the Inspector General and NNSA are also involved in determining what happened. In particular, we are looking to see whether there are steps that the laboratory or we should have taken to prevent the incident. I suspect there will be significant lessons learned for the entire complex once the investigation is completed. I'll keep you informed.

North Korea's Nuclear Test. On October 8, North Korea announced that it had tested a nuclear weapon, becoming the eighth state to conduct such a test and the first state that did so following withdrawal from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. The United States is working through diplomatic channels to reverse this decision. It is not clear what role there will be for the Department of Energy with regards to North Korea in the future. Secretary Bodman is, of course, participating with other Cabinet officers in policy deliberations. At a minimum, this action intensifies the importance of the work we do under Second Line of Defense and Megaports to counter nuclear smuggling. In the longer term, there may be other important calls for detection technology associated with nuclear weapons and nuclear materials. Such technology is the unique province of NNSA. Above all, this test should remind us that we are in an inherently complicated and dangerous world. That is why the work we do is so important.

Milestones. Someone once said that half of life is just showing up. I get to show up from time to time to help mark important milestones. Two occurred recently. On October 18, I took part in a ceremony where Naval Reactors handed over the former site of the S1C Nuclear Prototype. S1C was built in the 1950s and was used to train thousands of officers and enlisted personnel in nuclear power. It has been restored to the point where it is suitable for completely unrestricted use. This is the first time a former government-owned nuclear power plant has been restored to this degree. It is a solid accomplishment by our Naval Reactors colleagues.

On October 20, I took part in groundbreaking ceremonies for the National Museum of Nuclear Science and Technology (formerly called the National Atomic Museum) in Albuquerque. The new quarters for this well-known museum will help preserve the legacy of the first 60 years of the atomic age. The museum has always been an excellent one, covering both the defense and non-defense aspects of nuclear energy. It will now be even greater. We expect it to be open to the public in about two years.

Accomplishments. I am delighted to congratulate several NNSA senior executives on their designation by the President as Meritorious Executives. They include: Bill Brumley, recently retired Site Manager at Y-12; Dave Crandall, Assistant Deputy Administrator for Research Development and

Advanced Simulation &
Computing (ASC)
Defense Nuclear
Nonproliferation (NA-20)
Nuclear Cities Initiative
(NCI)

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Simulation in DP; Dan Glenn, Manager of the Pantex Site Office; Karen Henneberger of Naval Reactors; and, Kathy Izell, Chief Counsel at the Nevada Site Office. Meritorious Executives are recognized by the President as the very best of the Nation's civil servants. There is, however, one Presidential rank that is even higher. This year, the President named Tyler Przybylek, NNSA's Acting Chief Operating Officer, as a Distinguished Executive. This is the highest honor a career civil servant can receive. It is well deserved, as anyone who has ever worked with Tyler would agree.

Finally, an honor of a quite different kind came to Secretary Bodman. He was recently elected to the National Academy of Engineering. This recognition by the engineering community of Dr. Bodman's technical and leadership capabilities is extremely well-deserved. As most of you know, one cannot apply for membership in the National Academy of Engineering, as nominations are submitted by one's peers. This election reinforces what all of us know, how fortunate the Department is to have someone with such strong technical credentials as Secretary.

Safety. I want to spend a fair amount of this Lintgram talking about safety. I meet periodically with the Laboratory Directors, usually with Tom D'Agostino and Will Tobey taking part. In our last meeting, we discussed some possible confusion over safety. It got me to thinking about my own experiences as I travel around the complex. As I talk to people, I hear some disturbing myths about safety. First, I hear that safety is in conflict with mission. People assert that safety rules keep them from getting the job done efficiently. Second, I sometimes hear people speak of safety in terms of making sure that we are complying with the Code of Federal Regulations or with DOE Orders or with laboratory and plant directives. With this attitude, some feel that as long as we check all the boxes, we have achieved "safety."

I think both of these attitudes represent a serious misunderstanding. Safety is very simple. It means that the same number of people who walk in the door in the morning walk out of the door that night and do so without getting hurt. That sounds obvious, but we sometimes lose sight of it. That is why we keep emphasizing that safety is everyone's responsibility, because we are trying to prevent everybody from getting hurt.

The claim that safety is in conflict with mission accomplishment is simply wrong. Quite the reverse is true. Working safely is the best way to get our mission done. The time we use taking steps to prevent injury is small compared to the time lost if injuries occur. Further, paying attention to safety often makes the job easier. One example of this is Seamless Safety for the 21st Century at the Pantex Plant, where tooling designed to improve safety also makes production tasks easier. More generally, I believe Integrated Safety Management (ISM) improves both safety and productivity. That's why we are encouraging efforts to improve the implementation of ISM throughout the Department.

Viewing "safety" as synonymous with rule compliance is another serious error. We require things like hazard analysis, lock-out and tag-out procedures, and proper work authorization because years of experience throughout the DOE complex and throughout industry have shown that these are the best ways to keep people from getting hurt. Smart people learn from their experiences. Really smart people learn from the experiences of others. That is what we try to do when we put safety practices into effect through formal directives and through ISM. The first safety course I ever attended (several decades ago) was

on ammunition safety for Navy guns. On the first day, the first chart we saw contained the words "Ordinance Safety Regulations Are Written In Blood." So are many other safety regulations. We want compliance with safety procedures, not because compliance is a particular virtue but, because it is the best way to ensure safety. If we find that there are procedures that we have imposed on ourselves that don't add to real safety, we need to get that word up through the chain of command and we will get them changed.

A wise friend of mine once said that the most common form of stupidity is forgetting what you are trying to do. Don't let that happen to you in the safety area. The tools that we promulgate through regulations and directives are means to an end, but the end is simple. It is to make sure we all get to go home at the end of the day.

Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). On October 16, the Department held the formal kick-off of the Headquarters CFC. I suspect that most of you in the field have begun your campaigns as well. Filling out my pledge card and thinking about how I want my contribution distributed always makes me feel like a philanthropist. I know it is no substitute for the hands-on volunteer work that so many of you do, but contributing to CFC is something all of us can do. Participating in the CFC is truly voluntary. But it is a great way to help people. I hope all of you will take advantage of it.

Voting. On November 7, you will have an opportunity that has been denied to most individuals throughout human history. You will have the chance to vote for the leadership of the country and, in many cases, for your state and local leadership. The United States has always taken the view that voting is a voluntary act (unlike some countries in which it is a legal obligation). I am forbidden by law from seeking to coerce anyone to vote or not to vote. I am not, however, forbidden from encouraging you very strongly to vote. All elections are important. We choose the representatives who will establish policy that will affect all Americans. It is easy to assume that one person's vote doesn't count, but there are many counter examples, particularly in state and local races. Decisions are made by those who show up. Decisions about our government are made by those who vote. I urge you to take advantage of this special privilege.

That's all I have for now. Don't forget to vote.

Linton