

DOE/NNSA Cites Pantex Contractor for Price-Anderson Violations

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON , D.C. -- The Department of Energy's (DOE) National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) has issued a Preliminary Notice of Violation (PNOV) to BWXT Pantex, the primary contractor for the Pantex site, for nuclear safety violations associated with the development and use of a procedure to remove a cracked explosive component from a retired nuclear weapon. The component unexpectedly cracked during routine dismantlement activities on January 8, 2004 .

The technicians performing the dismantlement stopped all further work when the cracking was noticed, placed the weapon in a safe configuration, and then made all necessary notifications. During the next several days, BWXT Pantex engineering staff analyzed the situation and developed a procedure to remove the cracked explosive without aggravating the cracking. Development of the procedure involved consultation with University of California employees from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL), the source of technical information regarding the weapon. On January 13, the use of this procedure began to worsen the cracking, which again halted any further work.

BWXT Pantex management conducted a thorough assessment of the activities leading to the use of the procedure and found that a number of procedural errors had occurred. Contractor management found that: a safety review of the proposed procedure did not follow all requirements, the initial exchange of information between BWXT Pantex and LLNL was informal and thus did not document all necessary criteria, there was inadequate training of the technicians on the procedure, and the equipment routinely used for the weapon's dismantlement was not as robust as originally intended but this condition had not been previously identified. BWXT Pantex performed 185 corrective actions to solve the immediate problems and to prevent any future occurrence in any of its other operations.

After conducting an investigation of the event, DOE/NNSA has chosen to issue a PNOV to BWXT Pantex for breakdowns in its quality assurance and quality improvement processes that affected development and use of the procedure to remove the cracked explosive. The contractor was given substantial civil penalty mitigation in recognition of its assessment and corrective actions. The resultant civil penalty totaled \$123,750.

The Price-Anderson Amendments Act of 1988 authorizes the Energy Department to undertake regulatory actions against contractors for violations of its nuclear safety requirements. The enforcement program encourages DOE contractors to identify and correct nuclear safety deficiencies at an early stage, before they contribute to or result in more serious events.

Additional details on this and other enforcement actions are available on the Internet at <http://www.eh.doe.gov/enforce>.

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