

## TESTIMONY

**Ralph E. Erickson, Manager  
Los Alamos Site Office  
National Nuclear Security Administration  
U.S. Department of Energy  
Before the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board**

**December 16, 2003**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on the Los Alamos Site office's current practices for oversight and management of the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL).

There are four priorities at LANL in my mind in the following order – safety, security, environmental compliance and program. My responsibility as Manager is to ensure that my staff and the staff of the management and operating contractor carry out these four in accordance with the laws and the orders governing the DOE. To effectively accomplish this an active partnering relationship must exist between the Federal and contractor work force. In making this relationship work an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each of the two entities must exist. The NNSA reengineering process of the past 18 months has produced a base concept for roles and responsibilities – the Federal component is responsible for the “what” and the operating contractor is responsible for the “how”. This may sound over-simplified, but the reality is that this straightforward concept can be applied and understood by all levels of the individuals in the federal and contractor organizations. This concept of “what” and “how” is then applied across the board range of activities that occur at the site. This ranges from safety to security to QA to business practices to programmatic mission. This concept allows the site office personnel to spend the majority of their time focusing on the “what” of oversight. My primary responsibility and that of my staff is oversight of the contractor's performance, be that procurement, budget, safety, security or environmental matters. The increased staffing that has occurred at the LASO over the past 12 months further enhances this increased focus on oversight by site office personnel. This will be further amplified in the following responses to the lines of inquiry proposed by the Board.

- 1. Describe your site office's contractor oversight activities, including: types of oversight; directives that set requirements and expectations (including those levied from the headquarters level and those defined in field level directives) on oversight; the scope of topics involved; the frequency of oversight activities; any measurable performance criteria; lines of authority; resource availability/constraints; etc.**

The primary goal of the LASO is to enhance safety. My goal is to coordinate NNSA/LASO oversight with LANL self-assessments. Joint goals for performance in safety, health, environment, business practice and programs are established and measured through the appendix F appraisal process. However, recent issues reflect the lack of maturity of the LANL performance assurance system. For example, the recent type B accident investigation notes problems related to development and implementation of effective corrective actions. Present mechanisms to identify facility issues in a proactive manner, predict that a particular facility is headed for problems and assess the effectiveness of corrections are limited. The LASO FR program, LANL PS Division advisor program, and the enhanced PAAA program are examples of programs that are increasing safety and mission effectiveness. Working with LASO, LANL is in the process of implementing additional programs to improve the robustness of their contractor assurance systems. LASO will continue to use a risk-based approach for determining activities and programs requiring oversight.

- 2. Describe your site office's self-assessment activities and expectations, including: types of self assessment; directives that set requirements and expectations (including those levied from the headquarters level and those defined in field level directives) on self assessments; the scope of topics involved; the frequency of self assessment activities; any measurable performance criteria; lines of authority; resource availability/constraints; etc.**

I am not satisfied with our self-assessment process at LASO. We currently lack an office wide program to effectively assess all aspects of our mission. There are a few good examples that I intended to use to bring self-assessment to the next level at LASO. One good example is the recently completed detailed self-assessment of the Facility Representative program that included the use of Subject Matter Experts (SME). A review of the LASO quality assurance program was conducted as part of the effort to implement ISO 9000. A follow-up review by the Service Center while pointing out several gaps in the program recognized that efforts were underway to address these concerns. Internal quality reviews are part of the LASO Safety Basis review efforts. The NNSA wide effort to produce a common to all self-assessment program will provide the basic building blocks that will be implemented at LASO over the next year. Good self-assessment models exist within DOE today. My personnel goal is to implement the best ones which have the best fit for the LASO mission.

- 3. Describe the necessary technical staffing for your site office, with particular emphasis on the competencies needed to perform the activities outlined in #1 and #2, above. Provide the status of current site office staffing and qualifications. Discuss the differences between the necessary and the current conditions, if any, and outline actions being taken to address these differences.**

Approximately a year ago a managed staffing plan was completed to determine the adequate staffing for the entire LASO based on the guidance provided by HQ. The technical staffing of the site office was examined in detail as part of this NNSA re-engineering effort. The staffing plan identified a number of new functions and therefore additional FTE's necessary to meet these needs. Vigorous efforts were initiated to recruit qualified individuals for these positions from within NNSA. These efforts have been successful in several specific areas. I recognize that there has been recent discussion of Facility Representative staffing within LASO. There has been recent turnover in the FR program due primarily to the fact that these individuals are highly trained, technical personnel with field experience and therefore were strong candidates for other positions within LASO where they can contribute to the success of NNSA. I have been and continue to be a strong supporter of the FR program and helping FR's move to the next level of responsibility. LASO current staffing includes sixteen FR positions of which fully qualified personnel fill 11 positions. Recently 4 qualified FR's moved to other technical positions within LASO to enhance their careers and bring greater technical knowledge and qualification to program and engineering positions. A vigorous recruitment program for FR's is in place and I expect to fill at least two of these vacant positions with qualified FR's in the next month. New guidance from HQ will now allow recruitment of these and other positions outside of NNSA.

LASO has 12 Subject Matter Expert positions, of which only one is unfilled. These SME's include Industrial Hygienist, Occupational Safety, Fire Protection, Health Physicist, and Groundwater Protection and Maintenance Engineer positions. Many of these individual hold advance degrees and/or professional certification.

I fully support personnel obtaining recognized professional certificates and registration (i.e. professional engineer registration, certification in health physics and industrial hygiene and others) to include support of required re-certification and have changed office policy to allow reimbursement for professional certification. Also, personnel are encouraged to participate in formal academic programs with several participants at the Master of Science level.

Senior members of my staff serve as members of national standards organizations and represent this office and on occasion the NNSA at national meetings. They are also encouraged to conduct training and present seminars in their areas of expertise. All of the above serve to enhance the exchange of technical information and thereby ensure continued qualification of technical staff. I note that technical support from the Albuquerque Service center will continue to enhance technical reviews at LASO as implemented through service level agreements.

- 4. Describe the changes that will be required to ensure that the existing site oversight program meets the changes DOE [via proposed DOE P 226.1, ESE direction, or NNSA's *Line Oversight/Contractor Assurance System Policy Letter*, as appropriate] is pursuing. What is the status of implementation of these changes? When will these changes be fully implemented? What**

**interim or compensatory measures are included in the transition plan to ensure safety is not compromised while these changes are implemented? What metrics will be used to determine that the change has been successfully completed?**

In order to minimize the probability that gaps in oversight develop as new approaches to contractor assurance and line oversight are implemented, LASO has worked with LANL in the conduct of the program reviews. Efforts to base LASO oversight on the quality and integrity of UC/LANL self-assessment program continue as per DOE P 450.5. Reviews of the LANL contractor assurance systems document that most required elements of an assurance system exist through and have been implemented although the effectiveness is limited. Director Nanos has taken actions to address these shortfalls and to assure senior management involvement. LASO will continue to work with LANL to develop proactive assessment and oversight programs.

**5. In the Deputy Secretary's testimony on October 21, 2003, he stated, "*the Secretary has directed that all Headquarters and field senior managers review the Columbia investigation report and take necessary actions on lessons learned.*" At your site, what is the status of these reviews? What lessons learned and corrective actions have resulted from reviews of the Columbia Accident Investigation Board report?**

I have read the Columbia Investigation report and am personally participating on the NNSA wide lessons learned program being led by Gen Heckel. Copies of the report were provided to all senior LASO managers as required reading. The importance of the lessons learned was emphasized. Senior managers subsequently discussed the report with their technical staff and SMEs. LANL, with encouragement from LASO, conducted a review and evaluation of these processes.

**6. Describe your site's corrective action program, with particular emphasis on how it is integrated with your contractor oversight program. What program or process is used to identify and resolve the root causes of safety issues in order to prevent their re-occurrence? Is this program robust and mature enough to support the transfer of significant responsibility for conduct of safety oversight activities to the contractor? If not, what are you doing to strengthen it?**

In the past, LASO tracking of corrective actions was based on the DOE CATS system. It was recognized that the system was not fully satisfactory for tracking site actions for effectiveness and full implementation. A web-based system is being developed and several approaches have been tested. LASO is working with LANL as they revise their action tracking system to ensure ease of data exchange.

In conclusion I state again my four priorities for the operations at LANL – safety, security, environmental compliance and program. I recognize the concepts being implemented by NNSA for oversight are different than some of the more traditional methods used in other successful programs; however I believe it is necessary to give these new concepts a chance to succeed in order to produce a more effective and efficient means of accomplishing our mission. I hold myself personally responsible for achievement of these goals. Thank you for this opportunity and I would be pleased to answer your questions.