

Testimony of Mr. Jim Blankenhorn
Nuclear Waste Partnership Recovery Manager & Deputy Project Manager

Before the
Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board
Waste Isolation Pilot Plant Public Hearing
Walter Gerrells Performing Arts & Exhibition Center
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Good afternoon, Vice Chairman. I am Jim Blankenhorn, Nuclear Waste Partnership (NWP) Recovery Manager and Deputy Project Manager. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Board today. I will be detailing how worker and public safety is protected during WIPP recovery activities by compensatory measures that have been implemented to strengthen our Safety Management Programs.

Immediately following the February events, independent assessments of each Safety Management Program, utilizing industry subject matter experts, were performed for identification of weaknesses and gaps from the requirements. Compensatory measures were immediately put in place to address these gaps and weaknesses. Many of these compensatory actions have been reflected in the development and issuance of Evaluations of the Safety of the Situation (ESS).

The ESS documents used for recovery activities are developed by the nuclear safety organization. Since the beginning of the recovery effort, this organization has been augmented with nuclear safety subject matter experts with numerous years of experience across the DOE complex. During the development process, NWP and DOE maintained a dialog on the hazards and required controls to address the hazards for the activity to be performed. Once the documents are developed, they are reviewed by the NWP Senior Management Review Board. Upon NWP approval, the ESS is transmitted to CBFO for approval. During the recovery period, CBFO has utilized nuclear safety experts from around the DOE complex to support independent review and approval of ESS documents.

Once an ESS is approved by DOE, NWP utilizes an independent verification process for implementation of the ESS. This process verifies that the required procedure changes have been made, physical plant changes (if required) are complete, and personnel are trained and can demonstrate proficiency in the

ability to execute the ESS controls. Upon successful completion of the independent verification process, the NWP Operations Manager declares the ESS implemented, which allows the activity to be initiated.

In addition to compensatory measures, corrective actions have been developed to address findings from the safety management program independent assessments and from the Accident Investigation Board Fire and Radiological Release Phase I reports. Implementation and documentation of the closure of each corrective action will be verified through a Line Management Assessment, scheduled for the May to early June timeframe. Effectiveness reviews will be validated through the conduct of NWP Self Assessments later this fiscal year. A Management Self-Assessment will be conducted to verify compliance and full implementation of the Safety Management Programs and to declare readiness to perform a contractor Operational Readiness Review to be followed by a DOE Operational Readiness Review.

As part of the proceedings today, I look forward to discussing the actions taken to enable recovery activities and to provide specific discussion on actions related to; restoring trust and confidence; establishing emergency preparedness and response programs to ensure workers in the underground can safely evacuate the mine in the event of an emergency; improving and emphasizing work planning and work control; the establishment of a consistent and enduring nuclear safety culture; re-establishing strong disciplined operations; retraining the work force and revising our programs and procedures to operate safely in both contaminated and uncontaminated conditions and areas.