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DATE: OCTOBER 3, 1989

SUBJECT: STATE OBSERVATIONS ON THE DOE QA AUDIT OF SANDIA NATIONAL
LABORATORY

On September 11-15, 1989, DOE, through its contractor SAIC, performed a quality assurance audit of Sandia National Laboratory (SNL) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I attended the audit as the State observer. This memorandum is to relate my observations of the audit process and the Sandia QA program.

The Audit Process

Similar to the audit last year, given the security requirements at Sandia, the audit went very well. This year there was more freedom to move between audit groups because of the use by SNL of the unarmed escorts. This allowed me to observe more areas of interest. The escorts and the SNL staff were more than willing to escort someone wherever and whenever they wanted to go.

The Lead Auditor exercised adequate control of the audit and the auditors. The practice of having the auditor that found a potential SDR attend the TPO briefing to more thoroughly explain the problem worked relatively well. A little more polishing of this practice will make it a definite benefit to the audit process. I do recommend that the auditors do more to relate the problem to the requirement, if it is possible at the time.

Both the programmatic and technical auditors were diligent in their auditing and very professional. The team of Sid Crawford and Marty Mitchell auditing both technical activities and Criteria 3 in the same group worked especially well. Where possible, auditing techniques such as this should continue.

The Sandia QA Program

As has been the case for all the audits this year, there was not enough implementation at SNL to determine the effectiveness of the program. SNL was in the middle of transitioning to the new QA requirements from 88-9, Rev. 2. I do question the efficiency and timeliness of the transition since their QAPP that meets 88-9, Rev. 2 was approved by the Project Office on April 3, 1989. However, their plan to accomplish the transition was not submitted to DOE until September 5, 1989. The letter from Tom Hunter to Ed Wilmot describing the plan appears adequate. Because of this transitioning, I recommend to the Project Office that they perform either another audit or an intensive surveillance at the end of the transition period.

One thing I did notice during the audit is that the SNL QA organization is insufficient and the QA Coordinator has no actual authority over the QA staff. SNL needs to increase the staff for QA to ensure sufficient coverage of all activities. In Criteria 18, I noticed that SNL brings in Mactech once a year to perform the required audit of all the criteria all at once. While this meets the basic requirement of one audit per year, an increased SNL QA staff could possibly perform more audits or, at a minimum, more surveillances to keep on top of all the activities being performed. This might also allow SNL QA to catch any problems sooner or prevent problems from developing.

It was disturbing to me that this audit resulted in almost four times more findings than any other audit performed so far this year. The other participants also had little if anything to audit, the same as Sandia. This also might be an indication of insufficient QA staff and inadequate audits and surveillances.

Distribution

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