Fluor Hanford acts to reinforce lock-and-tag compliance

Since May, there have been eight lock-and-tag occurrences on Fluor Hanford projects, and the trend concerns managers at both the Department of Energy and Fluor. There have been no injuries as a result of the violations, but the potential for electrical shock or other injury existed in at least three of the occurrences.

The lock and tag on an electrical box protects workers from electrical energy and warns all others to stay away and not operate this equipment.

Lock-and-tag procedures are designed to protect workers and equipment from a sudden release of electrical energy or hazardous material. When power is shut off to a piece of equipment, procedures call for a warning tag on the equipment as well as documentation, independent verification and a system of checks and balances to be strictly followed before any work is done on the equipment.

In an Aug. 27 message to all employees, Fluor Hanford President Dave Van Leuven said the rash of lock-and-tag occurences prompted new company-wide procedures and a new training program for approximately 2,000 employees. In addition, the Spent Nuclear Fuel Project and the Central Plateau Remediation Project are working under special rules requiring additional controls and management reviews before any work is done that involves lock-and-tag controls.

"When we looked for efficiencies as we started accelerating cleanup work in 2002, we centralized some of our services," Van Leuven said. "Moving personnel between projects as needed has allowed us to achieve efficiencies, but it may have contributed to confusion as employees did similar work at different facilities with slightly different lock-and-tag practices. We believe the new single, user-friendly lock-and-tag procedure will eliminate this confusion."

Van Leuven said a special team of management and bargaining-unit members from a cross-section of Fluor Hanford projects was assigned to come up with a standardized procedure for lock-and-tag. In late July, the team began developing a corrective action plan and has been making progress on the following commitments:

- To develop a more consistent threshold for reporting lock-and-tag occurrences. A "decision tree" has been drafted that would provide better consistency on lock-and-tag reporting.
- To conduct an independent review of lock-and-tag events and analyze and identify systemic, or widespread, issues.
- To perform a company-wide assessment of employees who are responsible for implementing the lock-and-tag program and their knowledge of the program.
- To establish a new, user-friendly lock-and-tag procedure for the entire company. The team drafted the procedure, met with DOE and is resolving comments on the procedure.
- To develop and institute training on the new company-wide lock-and-tag procedure.
- To perform an independent review of the effectiveness of the new procedure and the training.

"Nothing is more important than the safety of the workforce," Van Leuven wrote. "I will not release the standing order for special lock-and-tag conditions at the Spent Nuclear Fuel and Central Plateau Remediation projects until we and the DOE are satisfied the proper controls are in place and that personnel are sufficiently trained in the new set of procedures." ■