



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

U.S. Department of Energy

AUDIT REPORT

DOE-OIG-23-16

March 2023

AUDIT ON SANDIA NATIONAL LABORATORIES' VERIFICATION OF CERTIFICATES OF CONFORMANCE FOR NUCLEAR WEAPON AND WEAPON-RELATED PRODUCTS

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Department of Energy
Washington, DC 20585

March 10, 2023

MEMORANDUM FOR THE MANAGER, SANDIA FIELD OFFICE

SUBJECT: Audit Report on Sandia National Laboratories' Verification of Certificates of Conformance for Nuclear Weapon and Weapon-Related Products

The attached report discusses our review of Sandia National Laboratories' verification of certificates of conformance for nuclear weapon and weapon-related products. This report contains two recommendations that, if fully implemented, should help eliminate ambiguous language in the policy related to this area. Management fully concurred with our recommendations.

We conducted this audit from December 2020 through May 2022 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. We appreciated the cooperation and assistance received during this audit.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Earl Omer".

Earl Omer
Assistant Inspector General
for Audits
Office of Inspector General

cc: Deputy Secretary
Chief of Staff



Department of Energy Office of Inspector General

Sandia National Laboratories' Verification of Certificates of Conformance for Nuclear Weapon and Weapon-Related Products (DOE-OIG-23-16)

WHY THE OIG PERFORMED THIS REVIEW

In fiscal year 2019, the Office of Inspector General received allegations of noncompliance with nuclear weapon product designs. Our report substantiated that a limited number of parts did not pass their specification testing but were accepted by the Kansas City National Security Campus. According to the root cause analysis, the Kansas City National Security Campus accepted the parts based on certificates of conformance (CoCs) rather than evaluating test data against drawing requirements.

To identify if this issue occurred at other weapon production sites, we initiated this audit to determine whether Sandia National Laboratories (SNL) verified the validity of CoCs for nuclear weapon parts and components.

What Did the OIG Find?

While direct weapon products at Purchased Product Value Stream (PPVS) had the validity of their CoCs verified through independent testing, indirect weapon products were not always independently verified. The suppliers' CoCs were not always independently verified because SNL used a graded approach, allowed in the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Policy (NAP) 401.1 § 2.1, and the unverified products were deemed low-risk. Per NNSA, subject matter experts from the Weapons Quality Division reviewed the rationale for the unverified products and found no issues with SNL's approach. However, due to ambiguous language in NAP 401.1, we could not independently verify that NAP was followed.

We also found that while SNL's Microsystems Engineering, Science, & Applications (MESA) facility could demonstrate that the procured weapon products tested had their CoCs independently verified, our assurance was limited to only the suppliers tested because of a lack of a complete and accurate population. As a result, we were unable to obtain reasonable assurance that the population of procured weapon products provided by MESA was complete and accurate for testing.

What Is the Impact?

The lack of clear requirements regarding the use of CoCs could lead to inconsistent application of policy across the nuclear security enterprise. NNSA acknowledged that the policy could be misinterpreted and has started taking steps to address this lack of clarity. Specifically, NNSA recently updated NAP 401.1 and issued NAP 401.1A in June 2021.

What Is the Path Forward?

To address the ambiguous language in NAP, we have made two recommendations that, if fully implemented, should help ensure the consistent application of the policy across the nuclear security enterprise.

BACKGROUND

Established by Congress in 2000, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) is a semi-autonomous agency within the Department of Energy responsible for enhancing national security through the military application of nuclear science. One of NNSA's core missions is to ensure that the U.S. maintains a safe, secure, and reliable nuclear weapons stockpile through the application of science, technology, engineering, and manufacturing.

One of NNSA's sites is Sandia National Laboratories (SNL), headquartered in Albuquerque, New Mexico, which is operated and managed by National Technology and Engineering Solutions of Sandia, LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Honeywell International, Inc. SNL is a multi-program laboratory with critical national security responsibilities, which include the design, development, testing, and production of specialized non-nuclear components and quality assurance and systems engineering for all U.S. nuclear weapons. The Purchased Product Value Stream (PPVS) organization at SNL is responsible for procuring Mark Quality¹ weapons grade piece parts and materials for various nuclear weapons production missions at SNL. In addition, the Microsystems Engineering, Science, & Applications (MESA) organization at SNL procures weapon products and is the largest Government-owned microfabrication facility specializing in radiation-hardened microelectronics for NNSA.

To ensure that products and services meet or exceed the customer's requirements and expectations, the Department developed Department Order 414.1D, *Quality Assurance*, which requires contractors to procure items and services that meet established requirements and perform as specified. To add confidence that the Nation's nuclear weapons stockpile performs as expected for the life of the weapons program, NNSA established NNSA Policy (NAP) 401.1, *Weapon Quality Policy*, which identifies the quality requirements applicable to weapons activities of contractors, including procurement requirements. Specifically, NAP 401.1 § 3.6.3 states that when supplier-provided reports are used as a basis of acceptance, the viability of the supplier-provided reports shall be periodically verified by the purchaser. However, NAP 401.1 § 3.6.5 requires a supplier's certificates of conformance (CoCs) for nuclear weapon and weapon-related material and hardware destined for production activities.² NAP 401.1 § 3.6.5 states that the purchaser shall establish a means to verify the validity of a supplier's certificates and the effectiveness of its certification process by at least one of the following methods: (1) independent evaluation of requirements or (2) independent assessment.

NAP 401.1 also includes a risk-management section and states that when choosing to use a graded approach, the risk-management process shall be used to analyze, determine, and document the rigor (i.e., which quality assurance processes need to be in place) of meeting the requirements of NAP 401.1, provided the risk-management process can ensure that there are no adverse impacts to the quality of weapon and weapon-related products. A graded approach is a process by which the level of analysis, extent of documentation, and degree of rigor of process control are applied commensurate with the risk of failure to meet requirements. In addition, the

¹ Mark Quality is weapon or weapon-related material that has been certified by the Department, NNSA, or a prime contractor quality organization to meet all applicable design requirements, drawings, and known design intent.

² Throughout this report, we refer to weapon and weapon-related material and hardware destined for production activities as "weapon products."

risk-management process and areas of graded rigor shall be documented in the Weapon Quality Assurance Program. The SNL Weapon Quality Assurance Program designates the Weapons Quality Management System for ensuring that weapon research, design, development, qualification, production, surveillance, and dismantlement processes comply with NAP 401.1 requirements.

In fiscal year (FY) 2019, the Office of Inspector General received allegations of noncompliance with nuclear weapon product designs. Our report, *Allegation on Weapons Quality Assurance at the Kansas City National Security Campus* (DOE-OIG-21-17, March 2021), partially substantiated the allegations and determined that two of the parts involved in the allegation did not pass continuity testing despite passing the quality program. According to the root cause analysis performed by the Kansas City National Security Campus (KCNSC), the parts made it through KCNSC's quality program without identifying nonconformance because KCNSC accepted the parts on CoCs rather than evaluating test data against requirements. To identify if this issue occurred at other weapon production sites within NNSA, we initiated this audit to determine whether SNL verified the validity of CoCs for nuclear weapon parts and components.

SNL'S CERTIFICATE VERIFICATION

While direct weapon products at PPVS had the validity of their CoCs verified through independent testing, indirect weapon products at PPVS used in the production of nuclear weapons, such as commercial off-the-shelf products, did not always have their suppliers' CoCs independently verified. The suppliers' CoCs were not always independently verified because SNL used a graded approach, which is allowed in NAP 401.1 § 2.1, and the unverified products were deemed low-risk. Per NNSA, subject matter experts from the Weapons Quality Division reviewed the rationale for the products not tested and found no issues with SNL's approach. However, due to ambiguous language in NAP 401.1, we could not independently verify that NAP was followed. NNSA acknowledged that these sections of NAP 401.1 are an area of ambiguity across the complex.

In addition, we also found that while SNL's MESA facility could demonstrate that the procured weapon products tested had their CoCs independently verified, our assurance was limited to only the suppliers tested because of a lack of a complete and accurate population. Specifically, SNL's MESA Facility did not require procured weapon products be tracked as Mark Quality nor formally identify the material as direct or indirect. As a result, we were unable to obtain reasonable assurance that the population of procured weapon products provided by MESA was complete and accurate for testing.

CoCs for Indirect Products

While direct weapon products at PPVS had the validity of their CoCs verified through independent testing, indirect weapon products at PPVS used in the production of nuclear weapons did not always have their suppliers' CoCs independently verified. Specifically, NAP 401.1 § 3.6.5 states that the purchaser shall establish a means to verify the validity of a supplier's certificates and the effectiveness of its certification process by at least one of the

following methods: (1) independent evaluation of requirements or (2) independent assessment. We reviewed a statistical sample of 60 Mark Quality weapon products out of an identified population of 2,440 weapon products procured in FY 2020 by SNL's PPVS.³

Of the 60 samples, 42 were identified as direct weapon products, meaning they were used in an actual weapon. We determined that all 42 of these direct weapon products had the validity of their CoCs verified by independent testing performed by either an SNL organization independent of the Product Realization Team, or the weapon products were sent to subcontractors for independent testing. For example, a (b) (7)(F) was received by SNL, and a sample of 50 out of the 500 (b) (7)(F) purchased were sent to an independent laboratory to confirm that the parts met the specifications identified on the part drawing.

The remaining 18 samples were identified as indirect weapon products, meaning they were used in weapon production activities but did not go into a weapon. SNL's indirect weapon products used in production of nuclear weapons did not always have their suppliers' CoCs verified. Specifically, of these 18 sample items, we identified 5 that were not independently tested. For example, (b) (7)(F), did not have its CoCs independently verified by testing against the part specifications. This product was accepted based on the supplier's CoCs. In addition, of the remaining 13 sample items, we identified 4 indirect weapon products that were independently tested, but only periodically. For example, (b) (7)(F) and has one lot tested every 30 months. The remaining nine sample items of indirect weapon products had their CoCs verified by independent testing.

When discussing these indirect weapon products with SNL and NNSA officials, we were told that the weapon products were not tested due to NAP 401.1 allowing a graded approach to implementing weapon quality assurance requirements. While NAP 401.1 does allow for a graded approach, the graded approach used must ensure that there are no adverse impacts to the quality of weapon products. Grading is the process of evaluating the likelihood that a risk/opportunity event will occur, assessing the range of possible outcomes (consequences/benefits), and combining these two elements to establish a risk/opportunity level.

When we asked SNL how its graded approach complied with these requirements and how a lack of testing these weapon products did not adversely impact quality, we were told that the products were deemed low-risk. Specifically, SNL's graded approach is implemented through various Nuclear Weapon Realize Product Procedures. The grading inspection and acceptance criteria should be considered based on the product requirements. Possible graded approach considerations include: complexity, criticality, risk, safety, and special impacts. Per NNSA, subject matter experts from the Weapons Quality Division reviewed the rationale for the products not tested and found no issues with SNL's approach compared to policy requirements related to using a graded approach. However, due to ambiguous language in NAP 401.1, we could not independently verify that NAP was followed. Specifically, NAP 401.1 § 3.6.3 states

³ Of the samples we reviewed, the direct weapon products were described as more complex custom products whose part drawing and part definition are controlled by SNL, whereas the indirect weapon products were less complex and more likely to be Commercial Off-The-Shelf. Some of the samples we reviewed were Commercial-Off-The-Shelf products.

that when supplier-provided reports are used as a basis of acceptance, the validity of supplier-provided reports shall be periodically verified by the purchaser. However, NAP 401.1 § 3.6.5 requires a supplier's CoCs for nuclear weapon and weapon-related material and hardware destined for production activities. NAP 401.1 § 3.6.5 also states that the purchaser shall establish a means to verify the validity of a supplier's CoCs and the effectiveness of its certification process by at least one of the following methods: (1) independent evaluation of requirements or (2) independent assessment. Based on our discussion with the NAP 401.1 policy owner, their interpretation of NAP 401.1, § 3.6.3 and § 3.6.5, is that the CoCs can be independently verified periodically. In addition, the policy owner stated that utilization of CoCs as a verification method is only one method out of others that can be used to accept weapon and weapon-related products for use in weapon activities. However, this was unclear in NAP 401.1. NNSA acknowledged that these sections of NAP 401.1 are an area of ambiguity across the complex. As a result, NNSA recently rewrote NAP 401.1, issuing NAP 401.1A in June 2021, and indicated that many of the new requirements will be found in the Defense Programs Business Process System documents, which have not yet been written.

Data Reliability at MESA

SNL's MESA facility could not demonstrate it consistently and independently verified CoCs for procured weapon products due to data reliability concerns. Specifically, the contractor could not provide reasonable assurance that the FY 2020 population of procured weapon products provided by MESA was complete and accurate for testing whether the suppliers' CoCs were independently verified. MESA neither adequately tracked its procured material as Mark Quality nor formally identified the material as direct or indirect. As a result, MESA had to compile a population of procured items and manually exclude non-chemical or gas materials. Because MESA data systems were not designed to enable quick retrieval of this type of data, the data was collected from more than one source and manually edited to include only weapon and weapon-related products. Based on the contractor data system limitations and our onsite review of the selected samples, SNL could not provide assurance that the population of parts procured in FY 2020 was accurate or complete. In addition, contractor system limitations also inhibited alternative procedures for developing a full population of MESA weapon product procurements.

While the contractor could not provide reasonable assurance that the FY 2020 population of procured weapon products provided by MESA was accurate and complete for testing whether the suppliers' CoCs were independently verified, we performed testing of direct weapon products in the population not treated as material. Specifically, we tested 75 percent (3 of 4) of these direct weapon products and determined that all received independent testing to verify the validity of the suppliers' CoCs. In addition, we found that MESA did not independently test indirect weapon products or direct weapon products that are treated as material when received. Instead, these types of weapon products, such as (b) (7)(F) that are used in tools throughout MESA, go through various testing procedures before and during the production process to ensure that the procured products and the final manufactured product meet all requirements. For example, testing of new materials was performed on a blank semiconductor wafer before the material was used in production. As a result, the specific procurements we reviewed did not reveal any

problems with verifying the validity of supplier-provided CoCs. However, due to the lack of a complete and accurate population, our assurance that MESA was verifying the validity of the suppliers' CoCs was limited to only the suppliers we tested.

System Limitations

Contractor system design limitations prevented us from determining whether SNL's MESA consistently verified the CoCs for procured weapon products. Specifically, the system where MESA maintains its data was not designed to enable retrieval of this type of data and, according to MESA officials, the population of procurements included non-weapon products in addition to weapon products. As a result, the contractor could not provide reasonable assurance that the population contained all Mark Quality weapon products, and we could not perform alternative procedures to make such a determination.

IMPACT

The lack of clear requirements regarding the use of CoCs could lead to inconsistent application of policy across the nuclear security enterprise. NNSA acknowledged that the policy could be misinterpreted and has started taking steps to address this lack of clarity. Specifically, as indicated above, NNSA recently rewrote NAP 401.1, and many of the new requirements will be found in the Defense Programs Business Process System⁴ documents, which have not yet been written.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the findings identified in this report, we recommend that the Manager, Sandia Field Office:

1. Direct SNL to ensure MESA procurements of weapon products for use in nuclear weapons production are clearly identifiable in its records system and includes necessary attributes.

We also recommend that the NNSA's Weapon Quality Division:

2. Ensure that Defense Programs Business Process System revisions make clear the procured weapon product acceptance requirements.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Management concurred with the report's recommendations and provided its current and planned corrective actions. These actions include MESA assessing the current materials procurement and management process to identify mechanisms for ensuring the necessary material attributes are clearly and properly recorded in its Enterprise Resource Planning systems. In addition, NNSA

⁴ Defense Programs Business Process System is the requirements and process management system by which NNSA realizes U.S. nuclear weapon products and manages weapon-related programs.

recently updated NAP 401.1A, which will take effect at all sites within the nuclear security enterprise by March 1, 2023. Further, NNSA kicked off a revision to the Defense Programs Business Process Systems that will include Weapons Quality Assurance requirements for procurement in R013, *Control Supply Chain*, which is anticipated to be released by April 30, 2024.

AUDITOR COMMENTS

Management's corrective actions are responsive to our recommendations.

Management's comments are included in Appendix 3.

Appendix 1: Objective, Scope, and Methodology

OBJECTIVE

We initiated this audit to determine whether Sandia National Laboratories (SNL) verified the validity of Certificates of Conformance for nuclear weapon parts and components.

SCOPE

The audit was performed from December 2020 through May 2022 at the Department of Energy's SNL; Sandia Field Office; and the National Nuclear Security Administration's Albuquerque Complex in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The audit scope included the verification of the validity of external suppliers' Certificates of Conformance for weapon-related products procured in fiscal year (FY) 2020. The audit was conducted under Office of Inspector General project number A20AL028.

METHODOLOGY

To accomplish our audit objective, we:

- Reviewed applicable Federal laws and regulations, the United States Code, and Department and SNL policies and procedures regarding nuclear weapon quality assurance.
- Conducted interviews with National Nuclear Security Administration personnel to gain an understanding of the requirements for weapons quality assurance.
- Conducted interviews with SNL personnel to identify internal policies and procedures and how personnel apply weapon quality requirements.
- Reviewed samples of weapon product procurements at SNL and statistically sampled 60 out of 2,440 Mark Quality weapon products procured by the Purchased Product Value Stream in FY 2020. The sample was selected with a 95 percent confidence, 5 percent upper error limit, and 0 percent expected error rate. We reviewed the procurements to determine if independent testing was performed to verify the validity of the supplier's Certificates of Conformance. Because the weapon products' complexity and use were not the same across the sample population, the results and overall conclusions were not projected to the entire population.
- Judgmentally sampled 75 percent of Microsystems Engineering, Science, & Applications' (MESA) FY 2020 procurements of direct weapon products not treated as material. A judgmental sample was chosen because the contractor could not provide reasonable assurance that the population contained all Mark Quality weapon products. Because selection was based on a judgmental or nonstatistical sample, results and overall conclusions are limited to items tested and cannot be projected to the entire population or universe of procurements of Mark Quality weapon products at SNL's MESA facility.
- Reviewed prior reports about weapons quality assurance.

Appendix 1: Objective, Scope, and Methodology

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We assessed internal controls and compliance with laws and regulations necessary to satisfy the audit objective. In particular, we assessed the control activities component and the underlying principle of implementing control activities. In addition, we assessed the monitoring component and the underlying principle of performing monitoring activities. Further, we assessed the risk assessment component and the underlying principle of identifying, analyzing, and responding to risk. However, because our review was limited to these internal control components and underlying principles, it may not have disclosed all internal control deficiencies that may have existed at the time of this audit.

We assessed the reliability of Purchased Product Value Stream data by going onsite and physically observing the data pulled. We validated a portion of the data by reviewing supporting documentation and interviewing SNL officials knowledgeable about the data. The Purchased Product Value Stream data was sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report. For MESA, the data set was determined to be of unknown reliability. Specifically, the provided population of FY 2020 weapon product procurements included non-weapon procurements. However, by doing an onsite visit, we were able to test some samples and gain an understanding of how MESA ensures procured weapon products meet their requirements.

Management officials waived an exit conference on February 14, 2023.

Appendix 2: Prior Reports

- Inspection Report on [*Allegation on Weapons Quality Assurance at the Kansas City National Security Campus*](#) (DOE-OIG-21-17, March 2021). In September 2019, the Office of Inspector General received two serious allegations of noncompliance with nuclear weapon product designs that, if true, could have had a detrimental effect on the safety and reliability of the nuclear weapons stockpile. We partially substantiated the allegations. Specifically, we substantiated that the Kansas City National Security Campus incorrectly accepted a limited number of parts 2A3555 and 2A3557 flex cables that were erroneously reported to have passed continuity testing but had, in fact, failed the continuity testing. We substantiated that the Kansas City National Security Campus had part 3A3917 rigid-flex cables manufactured in a manner that did not conform to the design's specification. Because of the quick action taken by the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) in response to our management notification memoranda and inspection findings, there is no expected impact resulting from these allegations. Therefore, we had no additional recommendations.
- Audit Report on [*National Nuclear Security Administration Nuclear Weapons Systems Configuration Management*](#) (DOE/IG-0902, March 2014). Our review substantiated the allegations and identified instances in which NNSA had not maintained accurate and complete configuration management information for its nuclear weapons and components. We also identified additional concerns with the use of nuclear weapons parts and components that did not conform to specifications. For instance, we found that NNSA sites could not always locate "as-built" product definitions or associated drawings for nuclear weapons and components in its official records repositories, and sites did not always ensure that parts that did not conform to specifications were fit for use in a nuclear weapon. Management concurred with our recommendations and stated that NNSA remains vigilant in configuration management information for its nuclear weapons and components as well as in supply chain management issues. Additionally, management's proposed and initiated corrective actions were responsive to our findings and recommendations.

Appendix 3: Management Comments



Department of Energy
Under Secretary for Nuclear Security
Administrator, National Nuclear Security Administration
Washington, DC 20585



February 13, 2023

MEMORANDUM FOR TERI L. DONALDSON
INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

FROM: JILL HRUBY 

SUBJECT: Response to the Office of Inspector General Draft Report *Sandia National Laboratories Verification of Certificates of Conformance for Nuclear Weapon and Weapon-Related Products (A20AL028)*

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the subject draft report. The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) recognizes the importance of weapons quality assurance and is continually striving for technical excellence. NNSA is pleased the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) results confirm the effectiveness of Sandia National Laboratories' (SNL) processes for validating certificates of conformance.

Nuclear weapons quality assurance is an extremely complex and technical area. Recognizing that risk must be managed, and eliminating all risk is not feasible, NNSA policy allows for the use of a graded approach when applying weapons quality assurance requirements. Engineers are expected to use their technical expertise to make risk-based determinations on the appropriate verification method for product acceptance. As indicated in the audit report, NNSA has updated policy to clarify this expectation, and is in the process of updating underlying business procedures. The attached management decision provides detailed responses to the OIG recommendations. If you have any questions regarding this response, please contact Mr. Dean Childs, Director, Audits and Internal Affairs, at (202) 836-3327.

Attachment

NATIONAL NUCLEAR SECURITY ADMINISTRATION
Management Decision

Sandia National Laboratories Verification of Certificates of Conformance for Nuclear Weapon and Weapon-Related Products (A20AL028)

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) recommended that:

Recommendation 1: The Manager, Sandia Field Office, ensure Microsystems Engineering, Science, & Applications (MESA) procurements of weapon products for use in nuclear weapons production are clearly identifiable in its records system and includes necessary attributes.

Management Response: Concur. MESA will assess the current materials procurement and management processes to identify mechanisms for ensuring the necessary material attributes are clearly and properly recorded in its Enterprise Resource Planning systems. MESA will then implement processes to identify and record material, including whether it is direct or indirect use. The estimated completion date for these actions is June 31, 2023.

Recommendation 2: NNSA's Weapons Quality Division (WQD) ensure that Defense Programs Business Process Systems (DPBPS) revisions make clear the procured weapon product acceptance requirements.

Management Response: Concur. As part of routine document management practices, the NNSA WQD recently updated NAP 401.1A. This update clarified the procurement section from the previous version of the NAP, and the new policy will be in effect at all sites within the nuclear security enterprise by March 1, 2023. Additionally, the NNSA WQD kicked off a revision to the DPBPS that will include Weapon Quality Assurance requirements for procurement in R013, *Control Supply Chain*, which is anticipated to be released by April 30, 2024. NNSA will track this item in the Department's audit tracking system through final issuance.

FEEDBACK

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Washington, DC 20585

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