

Don Nichols

Associate Administrator for Safety and Health

On March 4, 2009, Dr. Nichols was appointed the Chief of Defense Nuclear Safety (CDNS), reporting to the Administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration through the Principal Deputy Administrator. CDNS advises the Administrator in matters relating to nuclear facility and nuclear explosive operations, advises other senior officials on associated policy matters, and assists NNSA field and program elements with identifying and resolving nuclear safety issues as requested. The CDNS is responsible for assuring that issues concerning nuclear safety are identified and resolved.



Prior to his assignment as the CDNS, Dr. Nichols served as a Technical Lead in the Office of the CDNS since April 2005. His responsibilities included coordinating Central Technical Authority concurrence on directives and exemptions, as well as on issues relating to nuclear materials, criticality safety, and the safe operations of NNSA nuclear facilities. On behalf of the CDNS, he maintained operational awareness of nuclear operations at Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories. He was a team member on all CDNS Biennial Reviews conducted at NNSA nuclear sites, focusing on the Startup of Nuclear Facilities functional area, as well as other functional areas including safety basis and conduct of operations. He reviewed conduct of operations in the Tritium Extraction Facility operational readiness review in 2006, and served as the Senior Advisor on the Waste Characterization, Reduction and Repackaging Facility operational readiness review in 2006.

Prior to coming to NNSA, Dr. Nichols performed nuclear safety oversight for four years as a technical specialist for the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, focusing on operations at Pantex, Y-12, and DOE national laboratories. During that period, he evaluated nuclear facility documented safety analyses for compliance with nuclear safety requirements; performed onsite reviews of ISMS implementation; and performed extensive reviews of Unreviewed Safety Question process implementation across the defense nuclear complex.

Prior to 2001 Dr. Nichols spent 20 years in the U.S. Air Force, and was involved in a variety of Air Force and Navy nuclear weapon and reactor programs. His military experience includes five years evaluating and assessing space nuclear reactor technology, two years as director of a space nuclear reactor technology assessment program, three years performing nuclear weapon design physics analysis at Los Alamos National Laboratory, nine months leading the Air Force cruise missile nuclear weapons program officers' group, and two years working for the Air Staff at the Pentagon.



Biography

Dr. Nichols holds a Ph.D. in Engineering Physics, Air Force Institute of Technology; a M.S. in Nuclear Engineering from the Air Force Institute of Technology; and a B.S. in Nuclear Engineering from the Pennsylvania State University.