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DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

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May 27, 1994

The Honorable Hazel R. O'Leary,
Secretary of Energy
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretary O'Leary:

I have received and noted your letter of May 18, 1994, stating that the Department will require a 45-day extension for submitting the Recommendation 93-6 Implementation Plan. Discussions with our Staff indicate that the development of an adequate implementation plan will require an extension. It should be recognized, however, that some aspects of the Recommendation have a high degree of associated urgency.

For example, I would like to draw your attention to the impending retirement of individuals expert in defense nuclear matters, from positions of substantial influence and importance in defense positions of the Department of Energy. Some of these are about to retire from positions in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Defense Programs; others are leaving positions in the field. The departure of these individuals is the result of the attractive retirement policy entering into effect, and will exacerbate an already inadequate staffing situation that the Board believes to be unacceptable.

The technical competence throughout the Department, including, but not limited to, the executive ranks, will suffer as individuals resign their posts. This is occurring in areas vital to defense activities, at a time when that competence is already below a level which the Board believes to be necessary for continued safety. It appears that the Department needs to take an aggressive approach to supplementing the Defense Programs organization with additional, technically competent personnel, as you have shown can be done for the Office of Environmental Management.

While Recommendation 93-6 expounded mainly on effects of loss of key personnel from the National Laboratories and the Nevada Test Site, it also stated the need for efforts to address this real-time loss of capability within the Department. The development of an approach to expeditiously address these losses from Defense capability in the Department is called for, in conjunction with the development of the Implementation Plan for Recommendation 93-6.

Sincerely,

John T. Conway
Chairman