



The Secretary of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

April 10, 1995

The Honorable John T. Conway
Chairman
Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board
625 Indiana Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This is in response to your February 23, 1995, letter on a number of issues dealing with our response to the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) Recommendation 93-5. Characterization of the wastes in the Hanford tanks is important to nuclear safety. We understand the Board's concerns and will briefly address them in this letter.

Numerous problems plaguing the characterization program are caused by ineffective management. Ms. Jill E. Lytle, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Waste Management, and Mr. James Gallagher, Vice President, Westinghouse Electric Company, have discussed characterization program management, and they have jointly resolved to correct this problem. The Westinghouse Hanford Company has recently reorganized the characterization program into a project. All support groups for characterization now report directly to the characterization project manager, who reports to Mr. L. Trego, President, Westinghouse Hanford Company. These steps should correct many of the problems identified in your letter.

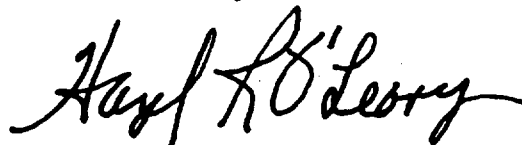
There have been a number of delays implementing Recommendation 93-5. We have stopped working on six commitments in our 93-5 Implementation Plan as explained in Assistant Secretary Thomas P. Grumbly's March 9, 1995, letter (copy enclosed).

There is no intention to abandon our original plan for characterizing the tanks. Over the past six months, we have been evaluating the technical aspects of a tank safety program, which would rely more on samples of the waste surface and cover gas. We will complete our evaluation as to the efficacy of this new strategy by the end of April 1995. We have no intention of implementing any new strategy that modifies your original recommendation without first consulting with the Board.

With regard to budgetary considerations, Mr. John Wagoner's memorandum dated December 29, 1994, contained his initial thoughts on the fiscal year 1996 budget. The notation in the attachment to that memorandum indicating elimination of funding for Recommendation 93-5 was a mistake and has been corrected. Current plans indicate that characterization funding will increase in fiscal year 1996 by about 10 percent (over 1995) in support of Recommendation 93-5.

If you have any further questions, please contact me or have a member of your staff contact Mr. Thomas P. Grumbly, at (202) 586-7709.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hazel R. O'Leary". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "H".

Hazel R. O'Leary

Enclosure