

[DNFSB LETTERHEAD]

April 9, 1996

The Honorable Thomas P. Grumbly
Acting Under Secretary
Department of Energy
Washington, DC 20585-0113

Dear Mr. Grumbly:

With your letter dated March 28, 1996, you provided various documents relating to the Department of Energy's (DOE) evaluation of new information regarding seismic analyses supporting the existing Authorization Bases for Savannah River Site's F-Canyon and H-Canyon. Additionally, you expressed interest in knowing if this information affected the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board's (Board) position on canyon utilization. The Board's position has not changed. The Board considers stabilization of materials stored in the canyons and corroding spent fuel in basin storage to be essential. DOE committed to stabilize these materials expeditiously in their Implementation Plan for Board Recommendation 94-1. Additional concerns regarding canyon utilization and spent fuel stabilization were communicated by the Board in two separate letters dated November 15, 1995. Stabilization of these materials on an urgent basis was recommended by the Board in order to reduce risk and improve safety at the site. The Board has also insisted that DOE ensure the readiness of these facilities to operate within a safety envelope established by the facility's Authorization Basis.

The Board is aware that there is an established process for evaluating new information, which may be relevant to operational safety and provides the operating contractor and DOE the opportunity to place restrictions on facility operation. The Board understands that the present restrictions on canyon operation were not initiated as a result of this process. DOE and the contractors determined that restrictions were not warranted on the basis that the information was not yet fully analyzed. The preliminary results indicate that there are no significant increases in risk related to earthquake accidents.

The Board will continue to monitor activities at the canyons including the potential seismic issue that is expected to be fully analyzed by July. While the Board cannot fully evaluate potential seismic issues until the DOE analysis is complete, the Board continues to believe that Recommendation 94-1 milestones should be met without delay.

Sincerely,

John T. Conway
Chairman

c: Mr. Mark Whitaker