

**[DOE LETTERHEAD]**

December 20, 1996

The Honorable John T. Conway  
Chairman  
Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board  
625 Indiana Avenue, N.W., Suite 700  
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Defense Programs has completed the commitments described in the Department's Implementation Plan in response to Board Recommendation 93-6, regarding Maintaining Access to Nuclear Weapons Expertise. The Department's approach for preserving vital skills and knowledge on weapons operations and testing was established in the Department's February 13, 1996 Implementation Plan, which was accepted by the Board on March 14, 1996. Defense Programs has institutionalized this program and has made a solid beginning toward the capture of key knowledge and expertise. The tangible evidence of this solid beginning includes institutionalized management practices and procedures for capturing and documenting critical weapons knowledge, released Weapons Safety Specifications (WSSs) for the W56, W69, and W76 weapons systems, and a sizable reference database of retrievable interviews with weapons design, operations, and testing experts.

We remain dedicated to capturing and documenting the critical and unique skills and knowledge already developed within the Department's workforce. The retention of these skills and knowledge will not only ensure continued competency in the near future, but also provide the foundation for training a new generation of scientists and engineers. We are continuing implementation of our WSS approach which we have previously described. The schedule for completing the remaining planned WSSs is as follows:

FY 1996: B53, W62 (B53 expected to be complete in February 1997; W62 in April 1997)  
FY 1997: W78, W87, B83, B61  
FY 1998: W88, W80, W84

This schedule reflects one minor change from that described in the February 13, 1996 Implementation Plan: the end date for the B61 WSS was switched with that for the W88 WSS in order to better support the established SS-21 Implementation schedule. The incorporation of archiving results into the B53 and W62 WSSs, originally scheduled for completion in FY 1996, is ongoing and expected to be complete in early 1997.

With the completion of the Department's Implementation Plan, this effort has reached sufficient maturity to be integrated into the normal line management organization as an ongoing responsibility. Ongoing efforts related to testing, including archiving, will be directed by the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Research and Development. The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Military Application and Stockpile Management will be responsible for ongoing efforts related to weapons, including weapons archiving. Each of these Deputy Assistant Secretaries, who report to me directly, will assure continuity of the momentum and success that we have achieved to date on this important program.

The periodic video conferences which were deliverables under the 93-6 Implementation Plan were found to be valuable. The Department will continue these video conferences on a quarterly basis for FY 1997 and on a semiannual basis thereafter. The conferences will be conducted under the direction of the cognizant Department line managers. The conferences will address ongoing implementation issues such as completing the remaining WSSs, integrating efforts at the various sites emphasizing operational safety issues, and assuring continued management support and funding. To keep you fully informed of our progress, we will provide you with summaries of these video conferences.

As requested, Mr. Vic Stello is scheduled to meet with you on January 22, 1997 to summarize program accomplishments, to discuss lessons learned from plan implementation, and to describe the path being pursued on key issues that have emerged. Again, Defense Programs has completed the commitments identified in the Department's Implementation Plan for Board Recommendation 93-6 and believes that it is now appropriate to move toward closure of this recommendation.

If you have any questions please contact me at (202) 586-2177.

***Victor Reis***

Assistant Secretary for Defense Programs

cc:

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