

[DOE LETTERHEAD]

January 26, 1996

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

Dear Mr Chairman:

In reference to your letter of December 20, 1995, I too am encouraged by the resumption of Receipt, Shipping, and Storage (RSS) operations at the Y-12 Plant. This successful restart is the first step toward achieving excellence in conduct of operations at the Y-12 Plant. As Mr Andrews' report points out, progress in improving conduct of operations at the Y-12 Plant has been slow. Progress has been made during the past year, and improvements made in RSS are now spreading to other mission areas. However, knowing the importance of the work conducted at the Y-12 Plant, the slow pace has been an enduring concern.

Mr. Andrews' observations are in general agreement with those reported by my staff. The Conduct of Operations Assessment Team, the Criticality Safety Assessment Team, and the Y-12 Site Office Restart Team (YSORT) have all cited continuing conduct of operations deficiencies. The Y-12 Plant must continue their efforts to make procedures more useable. More importantly, all managers of Lockheed Martin Energy Systems (LMES) must understand and commit to the principles of conduct of operations. This commitment is not yet in evidence throughout the plant.

The YSORT did an excellent job in disseminating conduct of operations guidance to LMES and ensuring that Department of Energy (DOE) expectations are carried out. This team has proven to be an invaluable asset to DOE in forcing the required culture change at the Y-12 Plant. The YSORT, as an element of DOE line-management, plays an essential role in steering improvements in conduct of operations at the Y-12 Plant. However, they are not responsible for the final assessment of readiness to resume operations. This responsibility rests with the DOE Readiness Assessment Team. As Mr. Andrews reports, this independent DOE team conducted a thorough assessment and found that RSS was ready to resume safe operations. While the Readiness Assessment did identify certain problems which needed correction prior to restart, it also confirmed that Y-12's preparations for resumption were substantial and sufficient for safe operations.

We value the observations and views of the Safety Board and will use this report in developing future assessment plans. If you have any further questions, please contact me or have your staff contact Dale Dunsworth at (301) 903-5156.

Thomas P. Seitz

Deputy Assistant Secretary for
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