

**[DOE LETTERHEAD]**

March 1, 1996

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

Dear Chairman Conway:

I appreciate your January 31, 1996, letter regarding concerns with startup and recent events at the In-Tank Precipitation (ITP) facility. I agree with the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board's (Board) assessment regarding the need for a better understanding of the complex chemistry involved. We are working with the Department of Energy Savannah River Operations Office (SR) to develop controls and mitigative actions to limit flammability levels to below 25 percent of the composite lower flammability level. We also agree with the Board's evaluation that SR staff are taking appropriate actions to address this concern.

A Justification for continued Operations (JCO) has been approved by SR to allow slurry pump operation in Tank 48. My staff will continue to work closely with SR and the Board staff to ensure that any operations involving Tank 48 are conducted in a safe manner. This JCO will strictly be for depletion of the benzene inventory and will be authorized for a period not to exceed two months. Any further operations will be addressed by either changes to the Authorization Basis or another JCO. However, assurance of a complete understanding and control of the chemistry in the In-Tank Precipitation (ITP) process will be required prior to DOE authorizing further processing of high-level waste in ITP. Additionally, the potential impacts of this issue on all downstream high-level waste facilities and processes are being reviewed.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (202) 586-7745 or Ralph Erickson at (301) 903-7188.

Sincerely,

***Richard J. Guimond***

Assistant Surgeon General, USPHS  
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management