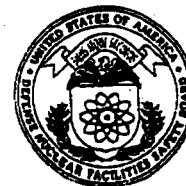


John T. Conway, Ch.  
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# DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

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(202) 208-6400



February 7, 1996

The Honorable Hazel R. O'Leary  
Secretary of Energy  
Washington, D.C. 20585-1000

Dear Secretary O'Leary:

As part of the Board's continuing oversight of activities at the Oak Ridge Y-12 Plant, a team of the Board's staff recently reviewed the status of highly enriched uranium (HEU) processing capabilities at Building 9212. A copy of their report is enclosed. It appears that Building 9212 has potential missions to keep it operational for several years, including support for the Stockpile Stewardship and Management Program, blending of surplus HEU, and production of HEU material for research reactor fuel. However, our staff reports that many aspects of the facility continue to require upgrading prior to operations including safety basis documentation, conduct of operations, criticality safety, and training and qualification of operators.

Additionally, Building 9212 and other facilities at the Y-12 Plant contain a large number of in-process HEU materials stored in hallways and operating corridors. Some of these materials have been present for more than 40 years and do not meet the criteria for interim or long-term storage. This in-process HEU material forms the largest portion of "material at risk" considered in Building 9212 accident analyses. The capability to process the materials exists within Building 9212; however, the ability to stabilize the materials awaits satisfactory facility restart efforts being pursued under DOE's Implementation Plan for Recommendation 94-4.

The Board and its staff have put forth considerable effort, through Recommendation 94-1, *Improved Schedule for Remediation in Defense Nuclear Facilities Complex*, and other activities, to address the potential threat to public and worker safety presented by unstable nuclear residues throughout the weapons complex. A substantial cause for this threat was poor management and lack of timely disposition of these materials when weapons production operations were halted. Corrective actions to remediate nuclear residues will require the expenditure of significant time and resources, and the Board hopes to prevent the occurrence of similar problems elsewhere in the complex.

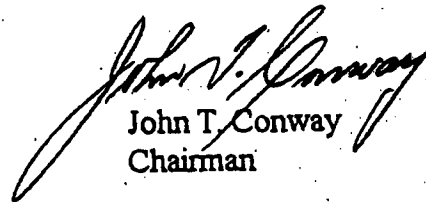
The Board recognizes that several potential mission drivers may dictate operational priorities at Building 9212; however, the Board believes that stabilization of in-process HEU materials at Building 9212 should be given high priority. In many ways the in-process HEU materials are

similar to materials identified for remediation in the Implementation Plan for Recommendation 94-1. However, in-process materials at Building 9212 are not scheduled for processing in the same time frame as the 94-1 materials. If not stabilized in a timely manner, these materials run the risk of becoming yet another part of the weapons complex legacy of nuclear wastes that pose a threat to public and worker safety.

Restart efforts for Building 9212 are addressed in DOE's Implementation Plan for Recommendation 94-4. In addition to those efforts, the Board would like to be apprised of actions that will be taken to characterize and catalogue the residues stored in Building 9212, and the priority with which these residues will be processed when operations are restarted.

If you have any questions concerning the above, or the report, please contact Mr. Steven Krahn of our staff.

Sincerely,



John T. Conway  
Chairman

c:     The Honorable Charles B. Curtis  
       The Honorable Thomas P. Grumbly  
       The Honorable Tara O'Toole  
       The Honorable Victor H. Reis  
       ✓Mr. Mark Whitaker  
       Mr. James Hall

Enclosure