

**[DNFSB LETTERHEAD]**

March 12, 1997

The Honorable Victor H. Reis  
Assistant Secretary for Defense Programs  
Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20585-0104

Dear Dr. Reis:

In late 1993, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) issued Recommendation 93-6, *Maintaining Access to Nuclear Weapons Expertise in the Defense Nuclear Complex*. The Department of Energy (DOE) has proposed moving toward closure of this recommendation.

In issuing Recommendation 93-6, the Board was reacting to the fact that many of those who had worked first-hand on nuclear weapons were leaving or soon to leave the DOE complex. If the anecdotal safety-related information they possessed were not captured soon, it would be lost. This loss could impact the resolution of safety questions that might arise during future stockpile management activities or disassembly of retired weapons.

The commitments in the original and revised Implementation Plans for Recommendation 93-6 established methods for meeting the Board's concerns, and all of the agreed-upon deliverables have been provided. However, the recommendation's intent has still not been fully accomplished, since archiving interviews with the experts associated with several remaining weapons have not been completed. This is a particular concern for weapons in the enduring stockpile, which must undergo future surveillance and other stockpile management activities, and will ultimately be dismantled in turn.

The Board, therefore, does not feel it is appropriate to close out Recommendation 93-6 at this time. The Board will follow DOE's progress toward meeting the objectives of the recommendation to ensure that the capture of expertise proceeds with dispatch, and that the overall knowledge preservation program continues to receive senior-level attention within Defense Programs. We welcome further dialogue with DOE and the other affected elements of the weapons complex on how best to ensure that the Board's original concerns will be addressed on a continuing basis.

Sincerely,

***John T. Conway***  
Chairman

c: Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.