



Department of Energy
Germantown, MD 20874-1290

August 11, 1999

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:

In your letter of May 11, 1999, you requested the Department report on the plans and schedule for addressing the issues identified during the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) Safety Management Assessment and for establishing an Authorization Agreement for the Technical Area (TA)-18 site.

LANL has completed its assessment of the safety management system at TA-18 and the current plan and schedule for addressing the identified issues have been reviewed and received concurrence from the Los Alamos Area Office (LAAO) for the Department. The plan and schedule for this effort are included for your information and review. They have been prioritized and resourced to address the more significant issues first, such as Quality Assurance, Configuration Management, and Conduct of Operations. LANL is already addressing a majority of the identified issues, and has reported closure of 12 out of a total of 40 identified issues. LAAO, with assistance from the Albuquerque Operations Office (AL) and Headquarters, will be reviewing the closeout of these issues in the near future, and will continue to meet regularly with LANL to monitor the progress of the entire plan.

In an agreement reached between LAAO and LANL, the effort to achieve a Basis of Interim Operational (BIO) and an Authorization Agreement for the TA-18 site will consist of three defined stages. The first, which LANL has already begun, is a systematic qualitative hazards identification and analysis of the TA-18 site to augment the currently approved Authorization Basis. This analysis, which is expected to take 3 to 4 months, will be used to formulate the baseline and subsequent plan, schedule and critical path necessary to complete the BIO and Authorization Agreement for the TA-18 site. The interim plan and schedule for the ongoing hazards analysis effort are currently being revised by LANL at the Department's request and will be forwarded to the Board no later than August 27, 1999, upon its acceptance by LAAO. The Department has requested that the output of this hazards analysis effort reflect both the controlled and uncontrolled risks at the TA-18 site, to allow a smooth transition to the second stage of this effort.



The second stage of the BIO effort is an in-depth quantitative accident analysis based on the identified hazards, to include the formulation of realistic accident families, and the identification of the required safety systems and components at the TA-18 site. During this second stage, the Department and LANL will finalize the master schedule for completing the BIO for the TA-18 site. At the request of the LANL Area Office Senior Authorization Basis Manager, DP-45 will be assisting in the review of the hazards analysis, BIO as well as the Technical Safety Requirements (TSRs). The Department will forward the resultant BIO plan and schedule to the Board, or brief the Board on its current status, no later than October 29, 1999.

The third stage will be the completion of the BIO, implementation of the requisite TSRs, and a formal Authorization Agreement for the site between the Department and LANL. The process used for this BIO effort will also supplement the larger effort currently underway between the Department and LANL to create a more functional and robust system for upgrading the safety analyses and Authorization Agreements for all of the nuclear facilities at LANL.

Responsibility for these efforts resides with the AL (exercised through LAAO) and Defense Programs Headquarters. The Department is requiring that both of these efforts be undertaken and managed as projects, with the appropriate baselines, change controls and reporting procedures. Frequent interaction between the Department and LANL to monitor progress and quality of effort is being undertaken, as well as the scheduling of formal and detailed status reviews of each project at agreed to milestones. This will ensure problems are identified and resolved in a timely manner to minimize schedule or cost impacts and facilitate a success oriented process, while maintaining a well-defined independent oversight posture by the Department.

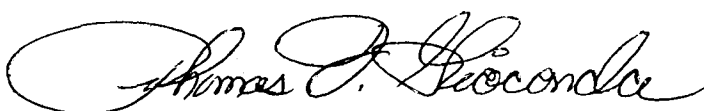
In the meantime, operations are continuing with mitigating actions and operational restrictions in place until the ongoing corrective actions have been implemented. This will ensure that operations at TA-18 are conducted in a safe and controlled manner consistent with integrated safety management. These mitigating actions and operational restrictions primarily involve a set of compensatory measures in the areas of Software Quality Assurance, Conduct of Operations, and Configuration Management. Any newly identified safety concerns will be resolved using the recently updated Unreviewed Safety Question process and the existing approved Authorization Basis. Changes will be reviewed by the Department and formally approved as required.

Every effort is being undertaken to minimize impacts to ongoing programmatic work at TA-18, including Departmental commitments related to Board Recommendation 97-2. A criticality safety course was successfully conducted during the week of July 26, 1999, and the Pilot Advanced Criticality Safety course is expected to begin in September 1999.

As you are aware, the Department is exploring the possibility of moving the current missions and capabilities from TA-18 to another location. Defense Programs will attempt to minimize the programmatic and operational impacts that may occur during any proposed transition, but some impacts are expected to occur. I will keep you informed of our progress and of the path forward we have chosen to better fulfill the Department's operational and programmatic missions and commitments.

Please contact me if you have any questions, or have your staff contact Mr. Daniel Rhoades, Office of Site Operations, at 301-903-3757.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Thomas F. Gioconda". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "T".

THOMAS F. GIOCONDA
Brigadier General, USAF
Acting Assistant Secretary
for Defense Programs

2 Enclosures

cc w/enclosures:
M. Whitaker, S-3.1