



Department of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

July 7, 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.

The Department understands the strategic importance of maintaining the capability to perform criticality experiments and for ensuring the retention of the requisite knowledge base to continue to improve our criticality safety practices. It is also understood that a major portion of this capability and knowledge base currently resides or trains at the TA-18 site.

LANL has completed its assessment of the safety management system at TA-18. The assessment has been accepted by the Department, and the plans, budget, and schedule for addressing the issues it identifies are under going internal review and validation by LANL. In the meantime, LANL has initiated some corrective actions (5 of the 40 issues identified have been closed). In addition, the hazards analysis effort associated with the preparation of the Basis for Interim Operations has been initiated. At this stage, it is clear that corrective actions to fully address the safety management assessment issues are necessary to ensure sustainable safe and compliant TA-18 operations in support of the existing mission for that site.

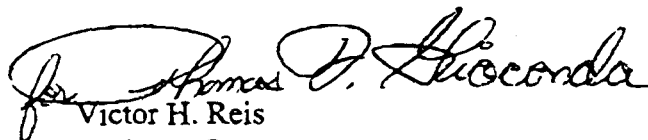
In the meantime, operations at TA-18 are continuing at a reduced tempo, including work on Board Recommendation 97-2 commitments, with mitigating actions and operational restrictions in place until more permanent corrective actions have been implemented. This will ensure that operations at TA-18 are conducted 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.



Accordingly, we are requesting a 60-day extension. We believe this is sufficient time to resolve the remaining budgetary and corrective action planning activities in order to provide the complete path forward for the TA-18 site.

I have also directed my staff to meet with you and the other members of the Board to discuss our path forward for resolving these issues. If you have any questions, please contact me or have your staff contact Dan Rhoades, Office of Site Operations, at 301/903-3757.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "for Victor H. Reis".

Victor H. Reis
Assistant Secretary
for Defense Programs

cc:

M. Whitaker, S-3.1