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Department of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

April 25, 2000

The Honorable John T. Conway  
Chairman  
Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board  
625 Indiana Avenue, NW.  
Suite 700  
Washington, D.C. 20004-2901

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On December 6, 1999, you transmitted to the Department of Energy "DNFSB/TECH 24 - Safe Handling of Insensitive High Explosive Weapon Subassemblies at the Pantex Plant" and requested that we:

- Reexamine our technical safety basis for handling composite Insensitive High Explosive (IHE)/Conventional High Explosive (CHE) weapon subassemblies.
- Determine whether additional engineered or administrative controls on composite IHE/CHE subassembly operations are needed in the interim.
- Evaluate current or planned differences between the safety controls for this class of weapon subassemblies and those for all CHE subassemblies to ensure that the differences are supported by the modeling, experimentation, and analysis completed to date.

We have examined the technical basis for handling IHE/CHE assemblies and believe it supports current operations. We will examine the need for additional analyses and controls through the pending Transportation and Bays/Cells safety-basis upgrades (to be implemented per Recommendation 98-2 plan, currently planned for within 12 months) and through the hazard analyses of each weapon operation. If the technical safety basis cannot resolve questions arising during these analyses, we will direct the research as necessary to answer the questions.

The enclosed correspondence, with its enclosures, provides the basis for our decision to proceed in this manner. We are available to brief the Board on this information, on the safety analyses planned for the Transportation, Bay, and Cell safety-basis upgrades, and on the hazard analyses for current or pending weapon operations of concern. Please pass any questions you may have to Mr. David E. Beck, my Deputy Assistant Administrator, at 202-586-4879, or Mr. Jeff Underwood of his staff, at 301-903-8303.

Sincerely,

THOMAS F. GIOCONDA  
Brigadier General, USAF  
Acting Deputy Administrator  
for Defense Programs

Enclosures - *Not attached.*

*(Unclassified when attachments are removed.)*

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