



Department of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

March 31, 2000

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

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In your letter of December 1, 1999, you raised issues concerning the complexity of the authorization basis (AB) at the Pantex Plant, the lack of integration between hazard analyses and operational controls, and issues associated with the consistency and quality of weapon response information in hazard analyses. The Board requested to be briefed on our plans to address these questions. On February 10, 2000, we briefed the Board on our plans to address the first two of these issues. The enclosure summarizes that briefing.

We believe these measures will yield significant progress toward the goals of the Board's Recommendation 98-2 by addressing the AB complexity and integration issues raised in your letter. We have assembled a working group with representation from the contractor and the laboratories to fully resolve issues associated with the consistency and quality of weapon response information in hazard analyses. We will provide you a progress report by May 1, 2000.

If you have any additional questions, please contact me or have your staff contact Jeff Underwood at 301-903-8303.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas F. Gioconda". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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

Enclosure

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



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Summary of Briefing on Pantex Authorization Basis

(Presented to the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, February 10, 2000)

Complexity of the Authorization Basis (AB) at Pantex resulted from the parallel development of a number of inter-related hazard analyses and operational controls. For example, the hazard analysis reports (HARs) and activity based control documents (ABCDs) for the W62, W76, and W88 were required in the same relative time frame as the lightning protection justification for continued operations (JCO) and revisions to the site-wide technical safety requirements (TSRs). Simultaneous development of multiple inter-related, separately reviewed documents created problems which were not detected until the documents were fully developed.

Our approach to the lightning protection JCO coupled with the new site-wide TSRs uses a new technical strategy which will greatly simplify the AB structure for Pantex. Under this strategy future HARs will accept the site-wide controls for a given hazard and focus on identifying additional TSRs unique to the given operation. The program plan for the remaining safety documentation upgrades will be modified to reflect this strategy for providing the Pantex Plant a safety analysis report and TSRs which are fully compliant with the Department's directives. The program plan, coupled with the integrated weapon activity plan, will be used to achieve the necessary integration with respect to schedules and resources.

The Pantex Plant operating contractor, Mason and Hanger Corporation (MHC), recently established a centralized organization reporting to their senior technical advisor in an effort to promote better integration. MHC is also developing an AB manual for plant personnel to define how integration of the various hazard analyses is to be achieved.

Within the Department, the Albuquerque Operations Office (AL) is modifying supplemental directive 56XB, Development and Production Manual, Chapter 11.4 to assign approval authority to the Area Manager, Amarillo Area Office (AAO) for HARs and ABCDs. Coupled with the previous delegation of approval authority to AAO for facility-level AB documents (from the Office of Defense Programs through AL), this change will result in approval authority for all AB being vested with the Area Manager. We believe a centralized approval authority will promote better integration from a Department of Energy perspective.