



Department of Energy
National Nuclear Security Administration
Washington, DC 20585

March 11, 2001

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

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I have received your letter dated February 27, 2001, forwarding the Staff Issue Reports on implementation of Seamless Safety for the 21st Century (SS-21) for the W76 and W88 nuclear explosive operations at the Pantex Plant. We agree with your premise that an innovative approach is required to simplify and expedite the SS-21 process, which is a fundamental objective of Recommendation 98-2, Safety Management at the Pantex Plant.

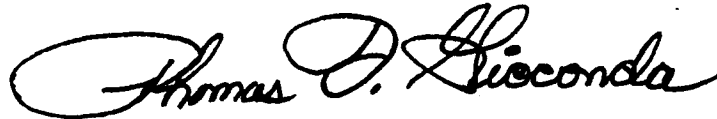
The Department is committed to fulfill its obligations in the 98-2 Implementation Plan (IP), and we are frustrated that progress has not been as good as we committed to in our September 2000 revision to the IP. Please be assured we place safe operations as our highest priority, and we are taking a number of steps to meet our commitments.

Your staff has been invited to the March 22-23, 2001, meeting at the Pantex Plant where Dave Beck, the responsible manager for Recommendation 98-2, will meet with senior representatives from the new Pantex contractor (BWXT Pantex), the Amarillo Area Office, the Albuquerque Operations Office, and the national laboratories on how to improve the effectiveness and safety of operations at the Pantex Plant. The agenda already includes, as you suggest in your letter, looking at replication of completed SS-21 projects as a means to accelerate the re-engineering of operations at Pantex and to improve physical controls. The meeting results will be used to assess our ability to meet the 98-2 IP commitments and establish the path forward to develop a fully resource-loaded Integrated Weapons Activity Plan



As previously committed to you during our December 14, 2000, briefing, senior Defense Programs management would like to brief the Board in April 2001 on our plans for the SS-21 process and how we will fulfill our Recommendation 98-2 commitments. This briefing will include a discussion on the feasibility of implementing innovative methods of achieving the objectives of Recommendation 98-2, as suggested in your letter of February 27, 2001. If you have any questions concerning this information, please contact me at (202) 586-2179 or Dave Beck at (202) 586-4879.

Sincerely,

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

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

cc:

Mark B. Whitaker, S-3.1