



Department of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

January 11, 2002

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

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the results of our evaluation and future plans for use of the Savannah River Site F-Canyon. As stated in my October 31, 2001, letter to the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board), the Department of Energy (DOE) broadened its review of canyon needs, including the potential use of F-Canyon to provide processing capability for plutonium disposition.

As you know, pursuant to Section 3137 (c) of the *Floyd D. Spence National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001*, by letters dated April 10, 2001, DOE submitted to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees the "Department of Energy Plan for the Transfer of All Long-Term Chemical Separation Activities at the Savannah River Site from the F-Canyon Facility to the H-Canyon Facility Commencing in Fiscal Year 2002." That plan stated that the chemical separation activities in F-Canyon were scheduled to be completed by the end of fiscal year 2002.

The results of our additional evaluation confirm that no materials specifically require chemical separation in F-Canyon, i.e., use of the plutonium/uranium extraction (PUREX) process. The DOE has also determined that the F-Canyon PUREX process will not be used for plutonium disposition purposes, although use of some portions of FB-Line for plutonium disposition purposes is still being considered. Therefore, operation of the F-Canyon PUREX process will cease following the currently ongoing stabilization of new plutonium sand, slag and crucible residues, which is scheduled to be completed in April 2002. Those activities in FB-Line and support systems in F-Canyon necessary to support the DOE-STD-3013 packaging and stabilization process, material characterization, and vault operations will continue until completion by approximately 2008.

Since no further use of the F-Canyon PUREX process has been identified, DOE plans to establish a safe, minimum surveillance and maintenance condition for all equipment associated with the F-Canyon PUREX and FB-Line Mainline processes. To accomplish this in a safe and orderly manner, DOE is currently developing a suspension plan that will consist of completing stabilization activities, de-inventory of plutonium by May 2002 and facility stabilization and equipment shutdown/isolation by February 2003.



Following implementation of the suspension plan, F-Canyon will be ready to transition into deactivation for further reduction in activities and costs. The DOE has not yet developed a cost and schedule plan to decommission the F-Canyon. Decommissioning activities would only commence after submittal of the joint certifications from the DOE and the Board that are required by Section 3137 (b) of the *Floyd D. Spence National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001*.

If you have any further questions or desire further discussion on this matter, please feel free to contact me at (202) 586-7710.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jessie Hill Roberson". The signature is written in black ink and has a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Jessie Hill Roberson
Assistant Secretary for
Environmental Management