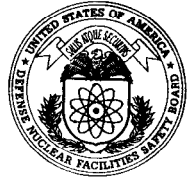


John T. Conway, Chairman
A.J. Eggenberger, Vice Chairman
John E. Mansfield
R. Bruce Matthews

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

625 Indiana Avenue, NW, Suite 700, Washington, D.C. 20004-2901
(202) 694-7000



January 22, 2004

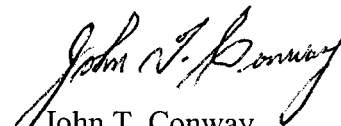
Mr. David E. Beck
Assistant Deputy Administrator for
Military Applications and Stockpile Operations
National Nuclear Security Administration
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-0104

Dear Mr. Beck:

On January 14, 2004, Mr. Gene Ives briefed the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) on his recently completed assessment of Nuclear Explosive Safety Study (NESS) operations and processes for the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA). His assessment also addressed the utilization of the Senior Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) within the NESS process. The Board wishes to express its appreciation for this briefing. The insights and conclusions he offered clearly establish the indispensable nuclear safety assurance that the NESS process provides, and the valuable contribution that the STAP makes to the NESS process.

The Board observes that NNSA now has sufficient data to devise a course of action to improve NESS operations and processes—the recommendation of the STAP, as discussed in the Board letter of July 9, 2003, and the assessment provided by Mr. Ives. The Board agrees with Mr. Ives' conclusion that responsibility for this process must be maintained, at a minimum, at the level of your office. Therefore, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 2286b(d), the Board wishes to be informed within 60 days of receipt of this letter regarding the actions you will take to address identified shortcomings and enhance the NESS process. In your response please include the schedule for completing the identified actions.

Sincerely,


John T. Conway
Chairman

c: The Honorable Everet H. Beckner
Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.