

John T. Conway, Chairman  
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# DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

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May 27, 2004

The Honorable Linton Brooks  
Administrator  
National Nuclear Security Administration  
U.S. Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20585-0701

Dear Ambassador Brooks:

The staff of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) has reviewed the status of safety bases at the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). The enclosed report prepared by the Board's staff identifies a number of related issues for your information.

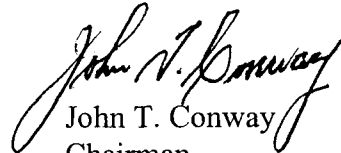
LANL currently has 26 nuclear facilities. NNSA has focused mainly on accident analysis and risk reduction for the one facility with the highest predicted accident consequence—Technical Area (TA)-54 Area G—and has paid much less attention to other facilities and activities. More-balanced priorities appear warranted based on a comparison of predicted accident consequences in all the facilities.

The annual update requirements for safety bases at LANL are not being enforced. Several nuclear facilities are operating with older safety bases; these include four Hazard Category 2 facilities with safety bases that are 5 to 8 years old. An example is the 7-year-old safety basis for the TA-55 Plutonium Facility. Its proposed update has been awaiting NNSA approval for more than 2 years. NNSA's recent Type B investigation found that the lack of current container requirements in the TA-55 safety basis contributed to the plutonium-238 uptake event that occurred in August 2003.

As discussed in the enclosed report, the operational safety of many nuclear facilities at LANL would benefit from more-balanced priorities in maintaining and improving the facilities'

safety bases. The Board believes that prioritization of the safety bases at LANL may deserve your attention, and will continue to follow closely the efforts of NNSA and LANL to improve in this area.

Sincerely,

  
John T. Conway  
Chairman

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

Enclosure 