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**DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES
SAFETY BOARD**

Washington, DC 20004-2901



December 7, 2010

The Honorable Daniel B. Poneman
Deputy Secretary of Energy
U. S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-1000

Dear Deputy Secretary Poneman:

The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) appreciates the action that you have taken to address the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) initiative to remove health and safety requirements from management and operating contracts at defense nuclear facilities. These requirements were established in Department of Energy (DOE) health and safety directives. Per your November 19, 2010 letter, the Board understands that you have directed NNSA to cease its initiative and instead pursue any changes to directives it deems appropriate through DOE's established directives review system. The Board supports the Secretary's and your efforts to strengthen and improve the directives system currently being conducted by the Office of Health, Safety and Security under the "DOE 2010 Safety and Security Reform Plan."

The NNSA initiative to reduce contract requirements was part of a broader NNSA governance transformation initiative. As the governance transformation initiative continues, the Board will continue to review and assess the safety implications of actions taken under its auspices. The NNSA Administrator and senior executives briefed the Board concerning NNSA's goals for this initiative and the anticipated end state. The Board also recently visited Sandia National Laboratories to better understand how the proposed contract changes would strengthen nuclear safety at that facility. However, many questions remain and the Board will continue to focus on understanding the basis, as well as the justification, for removing or relaxing specific requirements.

The Board will continue working with the Department to strengthen and improve its directives that are essential to safety at DOE defense nuclear facilities.

Sincerely,

Peter S. Winokur, Ph.D.
Chairman

c: The Honorable Thomas P. D'Agostino
Mr. Glenn S. Podonsky
Mrs. Mari-Jo Campagnone