

Statement

By

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**Presented
at the
Department of Energy's
11th Annual Facility Representative Workshop**

May 18, 2004

**Tuscany Hotel
Las Vegas, NV**

Good Morning. It is a pleasure to address the Eleventh Annual Facility Representative Workshop. The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) continues to view the Facility Representative Program as one of the Department of Energy's (DOE) most effective and efficient approaches for assuring the safety of the full spectrum of hazardous activities in the DOE Complex. Last year's Tenth Annual Workshop was praised as the "best workshop ever," and by looking at this year's agenda, it appears you could top last year's success. I commend Mark Whitaker, John Evans, and others who are responsible for putting on this workshop, and for keeping the Facility Representative Program running on all cylinders. A special congratulations to Joanne Lorence of the Los Alamos Site Office for your well-deserved selection as the 2003 Facility Representative of the Year. WELL DONE! And I would also like to recognize the 2002 Facility Representative of Year, Jerry Lipsky, also from the Los Alamos Site Office, and who is here today at the workshop.

Let me start with a few words on the origin and mission of the Board. It was in 1988 that Congress enacted legislation creating the Board as "an independent establishment in the Executive Branch" to recommend to the Secretary of Energy actions "the Board determines are necessary to ensure adequate protection of public health and safety." The Senate Armed Services Committee Report that accompanied the legislation was clear in what the Board was intended to accomplish.

"The Board is expected to raise the technical expertise of the Department substantially, to assist and monitor the continued development of DOE's internal ES&H organization, and to provide independent advise to the Secretary. Above all, the Board should be instrumental in restoring public confidence in DOE's management capabilities...."

Today, sixteen years later, how well has the Board met the Congressional intentions in its advisory role to the Secretary of Energy? Well, in response to Board recommendations and suggestions and in a number of cases its own initiative, DOE has made significant improvements in its safety activities. Each year, the Board in its Annual Report to the Congress lists the DOE improvements, and that information and accompanying discussions are available to the public on the Board's Web page. DOE, which includes the NNSA, continues to face exceptional challenges in conducting work safely. The types of hazards run the full spectrum: from extreme potential hazards beyond that of any commercial industry, that is, working with nuclear weapons, to industrial hazards common to almost all commercial operations.

As some of you may know, the Board held a series of public meetings earlier this fiscal year on DOE Oversight. One of the areas we probed were the lessons from the Columbia Accident Investigation with Major General John Barry, who later today will share his insights into the unfortunate tragedy that befell the Space Shuttle Columbia and her crew. One aspect described in the Columbia Accident Investigation report was the change in roles between NASA and its contractor. I quote, "*NASA structure changed as roles and responsibilities were transferred to contractors, which increased the dependence on the private sector for safety*

functions and risk assessment while simultaneously reducing the in-house capability to spot safety issues.” It appears that over the years of budget reductions and down-sizing at NASA, the NASA engineers and managers came to depend on its contractors for interpretation and analysis of technical data, and did not have the training necessary to evaluate the results. We cannot and should not allow this same sequence of events affect DOE’s ability to technically manage and direct contractors in the safe operation of hazardous activities.

That said, numerous examples still exist where DOE Facility Representatives and other DOE personnel have uncovered faulty work and safety problems on the part of contractors. The Board and its staff continue to observe instances when contractor line managers claim readiness to proceed on hazardous work and DOE operational readiness reviews reflect inadequate training of workers, faulty procedures and other safety problems. On the one hand, DOE personnel should not do the work and the planning for which the contractor is being paid. On the other hand, DOE personnel should not abrogate DOE's responsibilities and permit contractors to work without appropriate Federal oversight.

The Facility Representatives should continue to be demanding customers, assertive owners and responsible custodians. Your attitude and behavior in the facilities and the workplace should take on the following attributes:

- Maintain a healthy skepticism on the job for safety-related matters.
- Strive for excellence in conducting your work.
- Trust your intuition! When you are “uncomfortable” with a situation and your gut and experience tells you something is not right, then “pull the string” until you obtain a satisfactory answer.
- Be thorough and run every issue to ground.
- Keep open and direct lines of communications with your supervisor. Be comfortable going to your supervisor with a problem, and speak out when collateral or other duties are affecting performance of your primary duty.
- Seek continuous improvement and growth in your personal technical competence. It is vitally important to the success of DOE and the Nation.

Board's Recommendations 92-2 on *Facility Representatives*, 93-3 on *DOE Federal Technical Competence*, and the corresponding DOE implementation plans resulted in some

correcting actions in the area of technical competence. While there has been some improvement in this area, more still needs to be done. The Facility Representative Program, though, is a shining example of what can be achieved in the area of technical competence.

As with any program, however, if you are not moving ahead and improving, you're falling behind. There are some areas noted in the Board's recent letter to the Department where some improvements can be made to the Facility Representative Program.

One area is in better evaluating and defining staffing levels at sites. The Board's staff noted where some sites have lost or reduced the number of Facility Representatives and are below minimum staffing levels needed to adequately oversee work going on in their facilities. Given the length of time needed to train and qualify a new Facility Representative, sites should consider including in their staffing analysis a pipeline for an in-training Facility Representative position.

Another area is specific training on the hazards and controls associated with work within a facility. The Board's staff noted that some Facility Representatives do not receive specific training on the hazards associated with weapon operations or research activities. Training in these areas could help Facility Representative's ability to recognize and identify safety issues associated with the conduct of these activities.

As it stands, "technical competence" is a hallmark of the Facility Representatives and the Facility Representative Program. While individual Facility Representatives are not expected to be subject matter experts in all fields, you should be able to call upon strong technical resources that should reside in the Site Office or Headquarters and then, as a team, work to resolve technical issues and questions. The federal subject matter experts or Safety System Oversight personnel created by the Department in response to Board Recommendation 2000-2—some of whom are participating in this year's workshop—should provide technical assistance and direction on safety systems, but this group is just starting their training and qualification in this area.

I challenge the leadership in this room, the Senior Technical Safety Managers, and those agents on the DOE Federal Technical Capability Panel to give new energy to enhancing the rigor and quality in the selection, training and qualification of the Safety System Oversight personnel and for the other technical personnel to bring them to the same level of "technical competence" achieved by the Facility Representatives.

In closing, the Facility Representative Program should remain true to its original tenets - to have technically qualified and competent cadre of personnel spending significant time in facilities overseeing contractor operations. Just as I depend heavily on the Board's Site Representatives to provide first-hand, in-depth information about facility operations, your first-hand information on work activities is invaluable to the safe operation of DOE facilities. DOE is always one accident away from losing the public's trust and confidence and shutting down operations. The Facility Representatives, Safety System Oversight personnel, and Senior

Technical Safety Managers together can form a strong defensive team that can seek out and resolve issues before they become a real problem.

Good luck and enjoy this great learning experience.