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DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

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September 26, 2000

The Honorable Bill Richardson
Secretary of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-1000

Dear Secretary Richardson:

The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) has been made aware of your recent initiative to have the Department of Energy (DOE) assess, complex-wide, the state of its readiness and capabilities to deal with fires, both those occurring off-site and on-site. The Board commends you for this initiative. Recent wild fires in the vicinity of or on DOE sites in the West have dramatically highlighted the need and benefits of preparedness.

With respect to the need for upgrades of fire protection systems at defense nuclear facilities, the Board, as well as your independent internal safety group, Environmental Health and Safety (EH), repeatedly has stressed the need for selective upgrades of fire protection capabilities of virtually all sites in the DOE complex. This matter has also been the subject of previous attention at DOE's Secretarial level. Former Deputy Secretary Elizabeth A. Moler, for example, by memorandum dated May 14, 1998, urged all Program Secretarial Officers and Field Managers to address this issue.

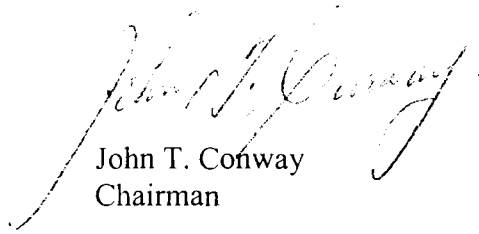
More recently, the Board transmitted to you on June 14, 2000, Report DNFSB/TECH-27, *Fire Protection at Defense Nuclear Facilities*. This detailed study contains technical concepts and principles important to maintaining the quality of DOE's fire protection program.

In its Recommendation 2000-2 dated March 8, 2000, the Board recommended that added attention be given to the state of readiness of vital safety systems in defense nuclear facilities. Fire protection systems and ventilation systems are principal vital safety systems. You accepted, on behalf of DOE, Recommendation 2000-2 by letter dated May 1, 2000, and the acceptance appeared in the Federal Register on May 22, 2000. The Board is now awaiting DOE's plan for proceeding, a plan you committed to provide by October 4, 2000.

The Board calls this Recommendation 2000-2 planning effort to your attention and urges you to ensure that the various fire protection initiatives being undertaken by DOE be pursued in a coordinated and complementary way.

The Board and its staff continue to remain ready to assist DOE as it moves forward on these initiatives.

Sincerely,



John T. Conway
Chairman

c: Mark B. Whitaker Jr.