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STATEMENT OF DON HANCOCK

DNFSB Hearing in Albuquerque, NM

February 21, 2019

Members of the Defense Nuclear Facility Safety Board (DNFSB):

Thank you for having this hearing in Albuquerque. I am Don Hancock of Southwest Research and Information Center (SRIC), based in Albuquerque. SRIC is a 47-year old non-profit organization that has been involved with Department of Energy (DOE) defense nuclear facilities and many other environmental and social justice issues throughout our existence.

SRIC previously submitted written comments on DOE Order 140.1 on December 28, 2018. As stated in those written comments, SRIC also is a member of the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability (ANA) and fully supports the ANA oral and written comments of August 28 and November 28, 2018.

To reiterate, SRIC strongly agrees that DOE Order 140.1 is contrary to law and should be rescinded, that the DNFSB should operate consistently with its statutory obligations and responsibilities, and that DOE and its contractors should fully cooperate with those Board activities.

SRIC also supports congressional action to ensure that DOE Order 140.1 does not inhibit the Board's activities at all DOE defense nuclear sites.

My further comments tonight focus on additional actions that the Board could take to enhance its activities in New Mexico.

1. I have attended previous DNFSB hearings in New Mexico, and I encourage the Board to have further field hearings here and in other states. New Mexico is the only state with three defense nuclear facilities, so the board's activities and information are especially needed here. I also agree with Board Member Santos' comment in his January 23, 2019 vote on the revisions to this hearing's agenda to "support future public hearings near other defense nuclear facilities in other states."

https://www.dnfsb.gov/sites/default/files/meeting/Board%20Vote%20to%20Finalize%20Agenda_0.pdf at page 7 of the PDF.

Such hearings can have several benefits, including having board members visit sites and hear comments from its staff, DOE officials, contractors, and members of the public. It's also a way for the board to convey information to DOE and the public in addition to its resident inspector reports, monthly reports, and other means.

2. With regard to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), SRIC reiterates its request in our December 28, 2018 comments that the Board increase its staff visits to the site and to strongly consider having resident inspector(s) at WIPP.

3. SRIC is especially concerned about continuing safety problems at WIPP and the inadequate responses to the 2014 fire and radiation release that could lead to additional significant events. We appreciate that DNFSB staff are identifying some problems in the monthly reports and assisting DOE to address them. But an additional indication of problems is that the DOE Office of Enterprise Assessment initiated an investigation on January 29, 2019 of Nuclear Waste Partnership regarding: "The events, occurring from July through October 2018, include multiple overexposures to hazardous chemicals, including carbon tetrachloride, nitrogen dioxide, and sulfur dioxide, as well as a series of heat-stress incidents."

<https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2019/01/f59/Notice%20of%20Intent%20to%20Investigate%20Nuclear%20Waste%20Partnership%20LLC.pdf>

4. SRIC encourages the Board and its staff to increase its scrutiny of the proposed new WIPP shaft and underground drifts. While initially proposed as a new exhaust shaft, it is not needed for that purpose. SRIC believes that, among other things, the new shaft is another of the many past and present DOE and

contractor financial boondoggles that waste taxpayer money. But the rush to approve such projects often leads to safety problems being overlooked. We would like the board to have the staff review, among other things, whether the design would safely and adequately integrate with the existing underground footprint, how the ventilation system would ensure that existing underground contamination doesn't spread into the new drifts and shaft, how ongoing ground control problems would be addressed in the larger underground area, the safety of the multiple evacuation locations, and whether best safety practices are being incorporated into the design.

5. The representatives of the three DOE sites in New Mexico should, orally or in writing, clearly detail how their interactions with DNFSB have changed since the issuance of DOE Order 140.1 on May 14, 2018 and any new planned procedures. If DOE officials say that there has been no change, then the Order is unnecessary and should be rescinded. However, based on SRIC's many years of experience with DOE and its contractors and the Board staff testimony at previous hearings, SRIC believes that the Order and its implementation is leading to decreased access to DOE staff and contractors and more difficulty for DNFSB staff to get information and documents. If those difficulties are occurring, that would be contrary to federal law, as well as undermining safety of workers and the public.

Thank you very much for your efforts to maintain and increase the effectiveness of the board and its staff.

