



01-0001014

The Secretary of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

June 12, 2001

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DNF SAFETY BOARD

The Honorable John T. Conway
Chairman
Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board
625 Indiana Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This is in response to your March 23, 2001, letter that provided comments on the Department of Energy's (DOE) 2000-1 Implementation Plan (IP) Revision 1. We are pleased you note that the plan presents a complete picture of our stabilization program. We believe that we provided the best available schedules for stabilizing all of the remaining materials covered by Recommendations 94-1 and 2000-1. The highest levels of DOE management remain attentive and committed to accomplishing those activities.

I would particularly like to clarify that the DOE has a single, integrated program to address the material issues originally identified in Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) Recommendation 94-1 and reiterated in Recommendation 2000-1. The 2000-1 Implementation Plan (IP) approved in January 2001 comprises the DOE's single set of commitments to the Board in this area.

The following discussion details the DOE's progress on evaluating the three topics specified in the Board's letter:

Savannah River Site (SRS) Plutonium Packaging

As stated in the former Secretary of Energy's September 29, 2000, letter to you, we believe that all plutonium at SRS can continue to be safely stored while Building 235-F is being modified and until final stabilization in accordance with the schedule contained in Revision 1 of our Recommendation 2000-1 IP. However, we are considering the SRS contractor's preliminary recommendation, cited in your letter, regarding installation in FB-Line of an outer DOE-STD-3013 container packaging system and furnace upgrades. We expect additional information from the contractor at the end of May, including better definition of the cost and schedule for completing these activities. Following our evaluation of that information, we will decide whether to implement an alternative approach to our current stabilization and packaging plans.

With respect to the Americium/Curium Vitrification Project at SRS, I would like to advise you that, because of the significant cost increase identified by the contractor in its recently completed baselining effort and the potential for delaying completion of vitrification in F-Canyon, we are currently re-evaluating the option of transferring the material from F-Canyon to the H-Area Tank Farm for vitrification in the Defense Waste Processing Facility. We have provided information on this effort to your staff.



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Consequences of Plutonium Immobilization Project Suspension

The Department has determined that no change in strategy is currently required for stabilization, surveillance, and storage of the Department's surplus nuclear materials. The Department is continuing with preparations and operations to stabilize the plutonium materials identified in the 2000-1 IP and package the material in accordance with the plutonium storage standard as described in commitments contained in that plan. We are confident that properly stabilized and packaged plutonium-bearing materials can be safely stored for up to 50 years. EM and the Office of Fissile Materials Disposition will continue to coordinate an integrated strategy for managing surplus nuclear materials and will provide you with an up-to-date status at an upcoming briefing.

Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) Delays in Stabilization

The Office of Defense Programs performed a review of the LANL stabilization operations and an assessment of the activities associated with stabilization or discard of legacy materials at LANL. This assessment was performed to identify opportunities to improve efficiencies and productivity in processing these materials. Several potential opportunities to accelerate the stabilization activities were identified during this review. The Office of Defense Programs and LANL are evaluating these opportunities to determine whether they will actually result in schedule improvements, based on current and projected staffing and resources.

We expect the SRS and LANL evaluations to be completed in September 2001. For that reason we are requesting a 120-day extension on the 60-day reporting request stipulated in your letter. In the interim, I have directed my staff to keep you and your staff informed to ensure that you are able to track our progress.

We continue to closely track work on all stabilization commitments, and are pleased to be able to continue to show measurable progress at several sites. We will keep you and your staff apprised of our progress in meeting the commitments in this plan. If you have any questions, please contact me or have your staff contact Mr. David G. Huizenga, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Integration and Disposition, at (202) 586-5151.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Spencer Abraham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "S".

Spencer Abraham