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DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

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October 25, 1996

The Honorable Alvin L. Alm
Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management
Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-0113

Dear Mr. Alm:

The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) has received your September 30, 1996, response to the Board's letter of May 9, 1996, which provided an issue paper entitled "Safety of HEPA Filter Units in Hanford B-Plant Exhaust Ventilation System."

The Board is pleased with the actions taken by the Department of Energy (DOE) to reduce the risk of a radiological release at the Hanford B-Plant by isolating the high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) D-filter unit from the exhaust airstream and placing a new unit, the E-filter, in operation on July 10, 1996. Your actions have satisfactorily addressed the Board's immediate concern that the D-filter, because of its advanced age and accumulated radiation exposure, presented the potential for a large release to the environment.

Further, the Board is pleased with the modification and acceleration of Project W-059, which will install a new exhaust filter system to bypass the existing system and allow for a permanent replacement of the current HEPA filter water seals. This action will significantly reduce the risk of a radiological release due to a failure in the current water seal system.

DOE is to be commended for its prompt response to resolve these potential safety issues.

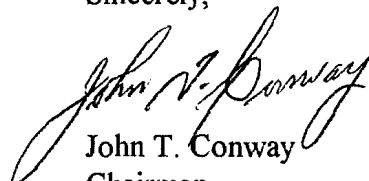
The Board and its staff will continue to follow DOE's plans and activities for deactivation and decommissioning of the exhaust filter units. In this connection, the Board is interested in reviewing the following additional documents when they become available:

- Results of the Department of Energy-Richland Area Office review of B-Plant Interim Safety Basis accident analysis (report expected November 1996).
- Results of the study to provide recommendations for interim and long-term disposition of the existing filter system and associated stack (report expected December 31, 1996).

These reports are referenced in the attachment to your letter, and relate to Board concerns regarding the effects of potential failures and remediation of the existing exhaust system.

Should you need additional information, please do not hesitate to call me.

Sincerely,



John T. Conway
Chairman

c: Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.