

John T. Conway, Chairman
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DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

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98-0000802



January 8, 1998

The Honorable Federico Peña
Secretary of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20585-1000

Dear Secretary Peña:

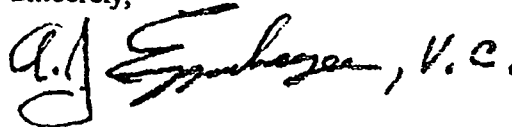
The Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site (RFETS) is preparing to stabilize plutonium-bearing salt residues in Building 707. In accordance with Section 3133 of Public Law 102-190 (105 Stat. 1574-5), the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) must issue a determination that your response to relevant Board recommendations is adequate to protect public health and safety before plutonium operations resume. The Board made such a determination for plutonium operations in Building 707 on February 16, 1993 (and reaffirmed this authorization on August 10, 1994), regarding thermal stabilization of plutonium oxide in the J-module of Building 707. The Board understands that salt stabilization is technically similar to thermal stabilization and will also utilize the Building 707 infrastructure, including some of the same process operators and the same health and safety orders and practices developed for thermal stabilization.

The Board has reviewed the RFETS preparations for salt stabilization and the RFETS readiness assessment. The Board and its staff applied the tenets of Recommendation 95-2 in this review, including identification of the scope of work and of hazards and controls, the ability for RFETS operators to conduct the work safely, and the application of lessons learned from the existing salt characterization program. Based on reviews conducted to date, the Board has determined that the Secretary's response to Board Recommendations 90-2, 90-5, and 91-1, as well as other actions taken at RFETS, are adequate to protect public health and safety with respect to the startup of salt stabilization in Building 707.

The Board understands further that at this time, the Department of Energy (DOE) will commence processing of plutonium-bearing salts containing low amounts of americium-241, which poses a radiological dose hazard. The Board expects that the experience gained in this initial effort will be beneficial when the remaining higher-risk salts containing higher amounts of americium-241 are processed.

The Board believes that salt stabilization activities can proceed safely at this time. No additional Board action is necessary prior to commencement of salt stabilization in Building 707. The Board will continue its oversight of DOE salt stabilization activities related to workers and public health and safety.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John T. Conway, V.C.", written in a cursive style.

John T. Conway ^{FOR}
Chairman

c: The Honorable Alvin L. Alm
Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.
Ms. Jesse Roberson