



Department of Energy
National Nuclear Security Administration
Washington, DC 20585



March 30, 2012

The Honorable Peter S. Winokur
Chairman
Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board
625 Indiana Avenue, NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This letter is in response to the concerns expressed in your letter of March 2, 2012, regarding the effectiveness of the nuclear explosive safety (NES) program at Pantex, specifically the independence and authorities of the contractor personnel responsible for evaluating proposed changes to approved nuclear explosive operations. The contractor's NES change control process is an important element to assure nuclear explosive operations at Pantex are conducted safely and within the parameters of the approved operation. I agree that any compromise of independence or diminished authority of the contractor personnel responsible for the process is cause for concern.

As acknowledged in your letter, the Pantex Site Office (PSO) has directed B&W Pantex to perform an evaluation of the contractor's process for identifying the details of activities considered in a NES review (from which change control is conducted); the independence of the organization conducting NES change control; and the transparency of information developed, used, and produced by that organization. As an immediate action, the contractor NES organization now reports directly to the B&W Pantex Plant Manager to ensure its independence.

At the date of this letter, B&W Pantex has completed an initial evaluation led by the contractor Quality and Performance Assurance Division. Further, staff members from PSO and the Nuclear Explosive Safety Division (NA-121.1) within my organization have observed the conduct of the evaluation. Corrective actions are under development by B&W Pantex, and PSO and NA-121.1 are reviewing the adequacy of the contractor's effort, conclusions, and corrective actions. National Nuclear Security Administration staff also will conduct a review independently of the contractor with consideration for the results of their report and their action commitments. We will provide a date for the independent review at our upcoming briefing.

I have assigned Mr. Steven Erhart, Manager of the Pantex Site Office, as the lead for responding to your concerns; and he will brief you in April on the initial results of the evaluation as well as the path forward. We will keep you informed about additional evaluations, actions, and improvement efforts. It is my expectation that safety processes for nuclear explosive operations are conducted with the utmost integrity which includes the NES change control process at Pantex.



If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact me or Steve Erhart at (806) 477-3180.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donald L. Cook", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Donald L. Cook
Deputy Administrator
for Defense Programs

cc: M. Campagnone, HS-1.1
D. Govan, HS-1.1
D. Nichols, NA-SH-1
P. Calbos, NA-10
K. Keilholtz, NA-10.2
W. Goodrum, NA-12
D. Baca, NA-121
J. McConnell, NA-17
W. White, NA-171
S. Erhart, PSO