

July 9, 2003

The Honorable Spencer Abraham
Secretary of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-1000

Dear Secretary Abraham:

On December 19, 2002, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) accepted the Department of Energy's (DOE) revised Implementation Plan for the Board's Recommendation 98-2, *Safety Management at the Pantex Plant*. In part, the Implementation Plan committed to effective and efficient implementation of Seamless Safety for the 21st Century (SS-21) by accelerating the use of enhanced tooling for two conventional high explosive weapons (Commitment 4.4.7).

The July 1, 2003, DOE letter to the Board states that an assumption necessary to complete the commitment for accelerated implementation of SS-21 tooling for W88 bay operations by the due date of May 21, 2003, was incorrect and DOE did not meet its commitment to the Board. The Board also understands that the commitment for accelerated SS-21 tooling for W-78 nuclear explosive operations which has experienced previous delays is again in jeopardy.

The Board is encouraged that DOE is working aggressively to complete the commitment and minimize the delay. However, the Board does not believe that events warrant changing the original commitment.

Therefore, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 2286b(d), the Board requests that DOE brief the Board as soon as possible on the recovery schedule for accelerated implementation of SS-21 tooling for W88 bay operations, and the path forward for accelerated implementation of SS-21 tooling for W78 nuclear explosive operations.

Sincerely,

John T. Conway
Chairman

c: The Honorable Everet H. Beckner
Mr. David E. Beck
Mr. Daniel E. Glenn
Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.