

July 9, 2003

Mr. David E. Beck
Assistant Deputy Administrator for
Military Applications and Stockpile Operations
National Nuclear Security Administration
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-0104

Dear Mr. Beck:

On June 12, 2003, the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) Senior Technical Advisory Panel for Nuclear Explosive Safety briefed the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) on activities and observations from the past year. The Board wishes to express its appreciation for this briefing. The data and insights offered by the panel members during their introductory briefing and the annual briefings provided in 2002 and 2003 have proven beneficial to the Board in carrying out its statutory mission to provide health and safety oversight for the nuclear weapons complex. The Board looks forward to continuing these exchanges in future years.

The Board notes that the panel members have provided several recommendations and opportunities for improvement intended to enhance the Nuclear Explosive Safety Study (NESS) process currently used by NNSA. The Board is particularly interested in the panel's recommendation regarding practical application of quantitative risk assessments in support of weapons response and hazards analysis. However, it is not clear that these recommendations are being evaluated and assigned to appropriate NNSA managers for resolution.

The Board and the panel members also discussed the relative conflicts caused by conducting the NESS and readiness assessment for the W62 program concurrently—a confluence that both the final report of the readiness assessment and the panel members agreed should not be repeated. The Board has not observed any action on the part of NNSA to institutionalize the separation of these two reviews in either NNSA or site-specific process documentation.

Therefore, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 2286b(d), the Board wishes to be informed within 90 days of receipt of this letter as to NNSA's plans and schedules for addressing or rejecting the recommendations made by the Senior Technical Advisory Panel during the past 3 years, and to institutionalize the separation in time of the NESS and readiness reviews.

Sincerely,

John T. Conway
Chairman

c: Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.