

May 15, 2000

Brigadier General Thomas F. Gioconda
Acting Deputy Administrator for
Defense Programs
Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-0104

Dear General Gioconda:

The Department of Energy (DOE) and its contractor at the Oak Ridge Y-12 Plant have been working for several years to address safety-related requisites for restarting hazardous but vital national security operations at Y-12. The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) has highlighted a number of safety issues requiring attention, including those described in the enclosed reports: (1) delays in stabilizing fissile materials in Building 9206, (2) deficiencies in the implementation of consensus safety standards and contractual requirements in activity-level procedures that control work, (3) prolonged reliance on cursory or limited-scope safety analysis documents for nuclear facilities, and (4) deficiencies in emergency management.

These reports are provided for your information. The topics identified have been included among those discussed by the Board with your senior staff and staff of the Y-12 contractor during a trip to the Y-12 Plant in April 2000. The Board will continue to advise you on our observations as we continue our oversight efforts.

Sincerely,

John T. Conway
Chairman

c: Ms. G. Leah Dever
Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.

Enclosures

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

Staff Issue Report

March 8, 2000

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. K. Fortenberry, Technical Director

COPIES: Board Members

FROM: M. V. Helfrich

SUBJECT: Response to Letter on Safety Bases at Y-12 Plant

On October 6, 1999, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) sent a letter to the Department of Energy (DOE) observing that DOE and its contractor at the Y-12 Plant had made progress toward improving the safety management of those operations that have been the focus of recent attention. It was also noted, however, that other activities had been less thoroughly examined or were being managed in accordance with outdated authorization bases, and that the program planned by DOE for upgrades to the safety analyses for operations and authorization bases at the site appeared to have faltered and to merit renewed emphasis. The Board conveyed its understanding that this issue would require vigorous staff effort, and expressed its desire to be advised of the path forward planned by DOE and its contractor at the Y-12 Plant for addressing this matter.

On January 19, 2000, members of the Board's staff P. Gubanc and M. V. Helfrich participated in a workshop on upgrades to the safety bases for nuclear facilities at the Y-12 Plant. This workshop was held in response to the Board's letter of October 6, 1999, and included attendees from both Lockheed Martin Energy Systems, Inc. (LMES) and the DOE Y-12 site office. LMES began the meeting by announcing a change in perspective on the safety bases for nuclear facilities, as outlined in the latest Implementation Plan for DOE Order 5480.23, *Nuclear Safety Analysis Reports*. LMES now plans to develop tailored Safety Analysis Reports (SARs) for all nuclear facilities, with the exception of 9206, 9201-4, and 9204-4 (which would remain as Bases for Interim Operation). Under the revised Implementation Plan, which had yet to be approved by DOE, LMES would continue to upgrade the current safety bases in fiscal year (FY) 2000 and would begin SAR development for seven facilities in FY 2001 (three SARs have already been developed).

After the workshop, the staff was concerned that although LMES had developed a schedule for this effort, prospects for any real progress were minimal, since neither money nor staff had been allocated for the SAR development effort. In late February 2000, the staff held further discussions with personnel in the DOE Y-12 site office, which revealed that LMES has made no substantive progress in implementing its plans to upgrade safety bases at the Y-12 Plant.