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DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

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August 2, 1994

The Honorable Hazel R. O'Leary
Secretary of Energy
Washington, D.C. 20585

Dear Secretary O'Leary:

The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) has reviewed the Department of Energy's (DOE) Implementation Plan submitted to the Board on July 5, 1994, for Board Recommendation 93-6 entitled *Maintaining Access to Nuclear Weapons Expertise in the Defense Nuclear Complex*.

The tasks and commitments in DOE's Implementation Plan for Recommendation 93-6 conform to the standards set forth in the Board's Policy Statement No. 1, *Criteria for Judging the Adequacy of DOE's Responses and Implementation Plans for Board Recommendations* (55 Fed. Reg. 43398). The Board, therefore, accepts the submitted Implementation Plan for Recommendation 93-6, with the following two reservations.

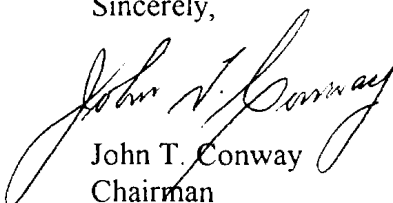
The Board believes that the definition of critical skills and knowledge resulting from the first two major commitments of the Recommendation 93-6 Implementation Plan ("ISSKP-1" and "ISSKP-2") should be used to support the personnel selection and training activities (Commitments 4.1 and 4.4) that are part of the infrastructure created by DOE's Implementation Plan for Recommendation 93-3, *Improving DOE Technical Capability in Defense Nuclear Facilities Programs*. Integration of these activities has significant potential benefit for DOE's efforts to attract, adequately train, and retain technically competent personnel in those weapons program activities associated with dismantlement and testing.

The Board notes that the Introduction to the Recommendation 93-6 Implementation Plan documents certain assumptions that were used in the development of the Plan. Among these assumptions is that "... fully integrated exercises and hydronuclear experiments will be conducted at the Nevada Test Site for the purpose of maintaining the safe conduct of nuclear test operations." In the body of the Implementation Plan, however, it is stated that, "In the absence of hydronuclear experiments, functional area exercises and full-scale exercises will be conducted which, in the short term, will maintain the capability to conduct underground nuclear tests safely." To assure that the Board's Recommendation will be fully implemented, the Board requires clarification on how DOE would intend to ensure the long-term maintenance of safe testing capability, if the fully integrated exercising of actual operations that would be provided by a program of hydronuclear experiments is not implemented.

The Board is impressed with DOE's commitment, as reflected in the Recommendation 93-6 Implementation Plan, to address the serious issues that the Board identified. It is especially notable that DOE has committed to an ongoing, integrated skills and knowledge identification and documentation program that should reduce the potential for degradation of DOE's capability to safely conduct dismantlement and testing activities, due to future personnel losses.

The Board will follow with considerable interest DOE's progress in the implementation of Recommendation 93-6.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John T. Conway". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J".

John T. Conway
Chairman

c: The Honorable Victor H. Reis, DP-1
Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Acting EH-6