

[DOE LETTERHEAD]

October 22, 1996

The Honorable John T. Conway
Chairman
Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board
625 Indiana Avenue, NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing to reaffirm the Department's intent to use Buildings 779 and 771 as deactivation and decommissioning models at the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site (RFETS).

Nuclear facility deactivation and decommissioning is a high priority for reducing risks and high operations costs. At RFETS, the Department intends to deactivate and decommission all nuclear facilities as quickly as possible within the next ten years. Executing the deactivation process in a manner integrated with other activities and with clearly defined objectives is paramount to safety. Deactivation methodologies, including the selection of "end-point" criteria, developed at other Department facilities, such as PUREX and on-site at RFETS, are being used as the basis for deactivating RFETS facilities. A deactivation and decommissioning process will be implemented and refined first on Building 779, which is scheduled for completion in Fiscal Year (FY) 1999. All containerized category I and II special nuclear material (SNM) has been removed from the building. The closure process will focus on an integrated approach for deactivation and decommissioning of Building 779. The process developed from the Building 779 experience, may then be used for larger, more complex facilities.

Currently, the highest priority activity in Building 771 is nuclear material stabilization. In FY 1998 stabilization activities are scheduled for completion and deactivation is scheduled to begin. Under the current Ten Year Plan, decommissioning of Building 771 will begin in FY 2000 and end in FY 2001. The Building 771 closure project will be used as a model process for the integration of SNM stabilization activities, deactivation, and decommissioning, building on lessons-learned from Building 779 and other relevant Environmental Management and industry experience. Close integration of these phases of work is critical to maintaining facility safety and minimizing costs. Building 771 will be the first large scale nuclear facility stabilization, deactivation and decommissioning project, and thus an important building for setting a successful precedent.

We have developed a logical path forward as a part of the Rocky Flats Ten Year Plan to eliminate urgent risks, stabilize nuclear materials, and deactivate/decontaminate/decommission facilities. We know the path will be challenging and welcome the continuing involvement and oversight by the Defense Board. If you have any questions, please contact me or have a member of your staff contact Jill E. Lytle, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Nuclear Material and Facility Stabilization, Office of Environmental Management at (202) 586-5151.

Sincerely,

Alvin L. Alm

Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management

[Handwritten Note: I welcome the Board's interest and involvement.]