



The Under Secretary of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

June 13, 1996

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

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This is in response to your May 10, 1996, letter transmitting a trip report dated April 19, 1996, which documents the April 1-4, 1996, trip made by the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board staff.

The report discusses the Board's review of the Department's Operational Readiness Review (Review) of the High-level Liquid Waste Evaporator (Evaporator) at the Idaho Chemical Processing Plant, Idaho National Engineering Laboratory.

Startup of the Evaporator is critical to the operation of the New Waste Calcining Facility to achieve pretreatment of tank farm wastes and processing of the tank farm wastes at Idaho as required by the Settlement Agreement between the State of Idaho, Department of Energy (DOE), and the Navy.

On March 27, 1996, the Idaho Operations Office certified its readiness to perform oversight during operation of the Evaporator and conduct the Review pursuant to DOE Order 425.1 (Memorandum from W. Jensen to R. Seal). The Review was begun on March 28, 1996, and suspended April 2, 1996, by DOE line management due to problems with equipment and systems management areas. Your staff was present during a portion of this period and concurred with the observations of the Review Team.

We have remedied the problems requiring the suspension of the Review, including system modifications to correct the condensate drain split flow anomaly.

The Review resumed on April 29, 1996, and the field work was completed May 14, 1996. All pre-start and some post-start findings will be closed within a week. Your staff was present during the first week of the resumed Review.

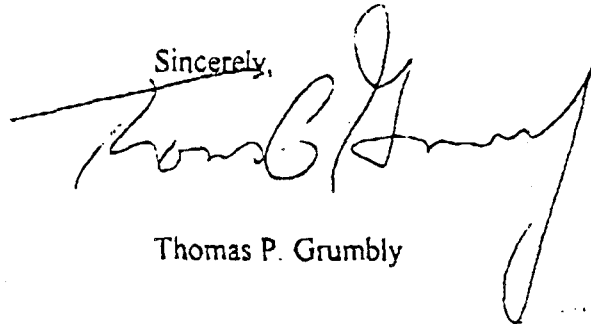
We have scheduled startup of the Evaporator before the end of May 1996. This is predicated on the successful completion of the final report from the DOE Review Team, verification of closure of pre-start findings, and obtaining necessary approval from line management.

The Idaho Operations Office has reviewed the sequence of events leading to the suspension of the Review. Prior to beginning the Review, the Idaho Operations Office assessed the contractor's state of readiness by reviewing the contractor corrective action plan for pre-start findings; the closure documentation for completed pre-start findings; and a list of manageable open pre-start findings and associated schedule for closure. Problems identified as post-start findings were larger than anticipated and led to the Review suspension.

In the future, Idaho Operations Office line management will thoroughly document the process used to verify readiness and review post-start findings to ensure proper categorization. In the past three years, the Idaho Operations Office has completed sixteen assessments to verify readiness, with only one suspension. This demonstrates the commitment and seriousness of the Idaho Operations Office regarding this activity. We thank the Board and staff for their contributions to improving the Review process within DOE. We expect the Evaporator to soon begin efficient and safe operations.

If you have any questions, please contact Rear Admiral Richard Guimond, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Environmental Management, at (202) 586-7710 or have your staff contact Mr. Ron Ramsey, Office of Western Operations at (301) 903-7981.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Grumbly", with a large, stylized flourish extending downwards and to the right.

Thomas P. Grumbly