

[SOE LETTERHEAD]

April 25, 1997

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

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This is in response to your [April 2, 1997](#), letter regarding the Implementation Plan for Recommendation 93-3, *Improving Technical Capability in Defense Nuclear Facilities Programs*. I am committed to providing the leadership necessary to make excellence in nuclear safety management a reality at the Department of Energy. Technical work force competence is a vital component of safeguarding the public, our employees, and the environment. We agree that the Department has made significant progress over the last several years but that there is more to be done.

We appreciate your concern regarding the continued viability of efforts initiated under the Implementation Plan. Senior departmental staff met with the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) staff in February and March. The meetings were held to discuss the progress in improving technical work force competency and the revision of the Implementation Plan. We will move forward with the revision and will work with the Board staff to design a realistic, needs-based approach that features performance measures and milestones for completing key actions.

Involvement of the Department's senior line managers with defense nuclear facility responsibilities is essential to the success of this effort. A group of these managers will convene in June 1997 to help identify the key technical competence issues affecting the Department now and in the future. Then, in keeping with the cooperative tone set at the June 1996 Department/Board Joint Off-Site Conference, the Department and the Board should meet to discuss these key issues.

I look forward to a productive relationship with the Board on the many aspects of achieving improved nuclear safety management, including continuing to upgrade the technical competence of the Department's work force. We are committed to the same goals for the Department; working together we will achieve them.

Sincerely,

Federico Peña