



Department of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

October 16, 1997

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

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am responding to your September 5, 1997, letter to Victor H. Reis on the W79 Single Internal Readiness Review (SIRR) conducted June 18-26, 1997. The purpose of the review was to evaluate the readiness to prove in the W79 special tooling on a 6B trainer shape (inert pit with high explosives). The W79 Project Team is addressing all findings by developing and implementing corrective action plans. Closure of all prestart findings will be validated by the W79 Project Team; confirmed by the W79 SIRR Team; and concurred on by Mason & Hanger-Silas Mason Company, Incorporated, and Department of Energy (DOE) management prior to DOE/Albuquerque Operations Office approval for W79 operations. This closure process will assure W79 operations will be conducted in a safe and predictable manner.

You expressed a concern over the W79 Project Team's state of readiness prior to conducting the SIRR. The W79 Project Team made a deliberate decision to proceed with the review, while formally acknowledging the existence of seven prestart conditions. The Project Team intended to address these prestart conditions concurrent with the SIRR process and prior to start of W79 6B operations. Approval for operations will be subject to successful completion of a Pantex Plant independent SIRR for war reserve (WR) operations, an independent external safety evaluation for disassembly operations, and a nuclear explosive safety study.

We welcome the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board's monitoring the W79 Project Team closure of the W79 6B SIRR and readiness preparations for WR operations. We encourage feedback and comments to help us enhance our safety process. Further, we agree too many

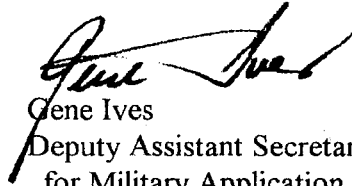


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prestart issues, especially those without specific, detailed implementation plans, can defeat the intent of the SIRR. We will take every measure to assure we avoid these problems.

If you have further questions, please contact me at 202-586-4879 or your staff may contact Abdul Dasti at 301-903-7724.

Sincerely,



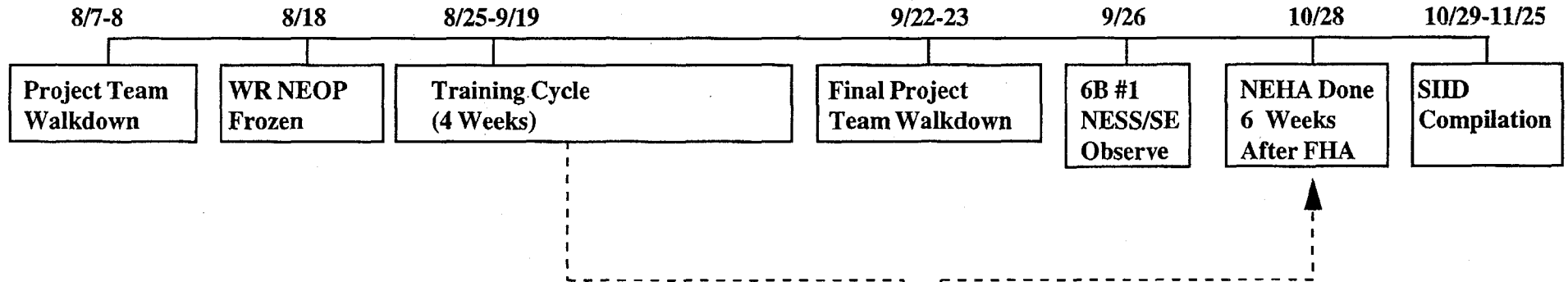
Gene Ives
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Military Application and
Stockpile Management
Defense Programs

Enclosure

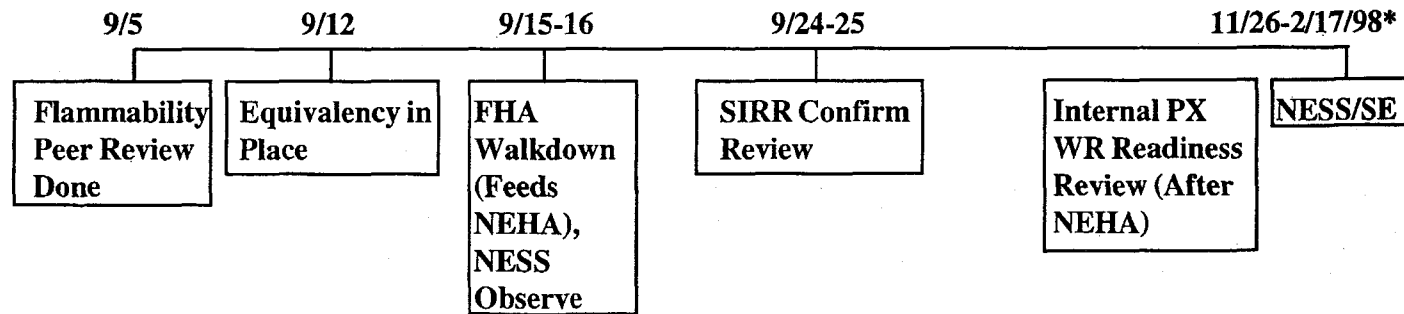
cc w/enclosure:
M. Whitaker, S-3.1
V. Stello, DP-3
S. Goodrum, AAO
D. Schmidt, AAO
M. Baca, AL
D. Monette, AL
H. Berman, M&H

W79 Program - Cell Path Forward Project Team/Management Team Agreement
August 6, 1997
January 98 FDU Is The Requirement

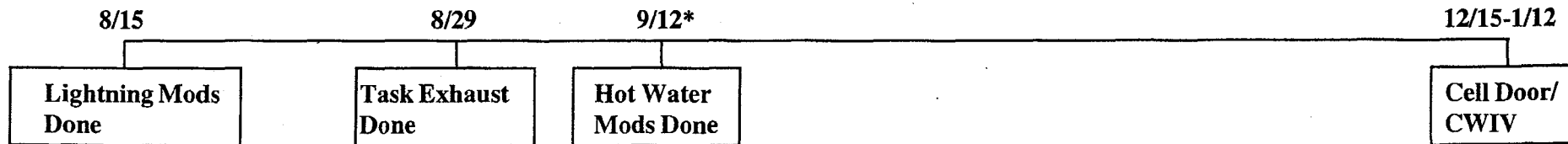
Process Development



Reviews



Facility Modifications



* Resolution Required

dated 08/26/97