

[DOE LETTERHEAD]

September 8, 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 would like to thank you for your letter of [August 8, 1997](#), continuing our very useful exchange on the W69 dismantlement program. Additionally, I would like to thank you for your efforts in supporting our meeting with the Board on July 18, 1997, prior to beginning W69 dismantlement operations. Since that meeting, the Pantex contractor has proceeded with safely dismantling approximately 22 W69 units. Also, the Department is continuing to emphasize completing open (i.e., poststart) W69 Nuclear Explosives Safety Study dismantlement issues.

Relative to your letter of August 8, 1997, the attached trip report was available prior to our July 18, 1997, meeting and our responses were briefed at that time. Defense Programs (DP) will document those responses and provide them by September 30, 1997.

Defense Programs shares the Board's concern that the proper criteria are used for the selection of facilities in which to conduct nuclear weapons operations. In the July 18, 1997, meeting we indicated that the current facility selection process was being reviewed to ensure facility capabilities were being adequately considered with respect to hazards of specific nuclear weapons operations. Mason & Hanger Corporation's Internal Operating Procedure, entitled "Selecting Facilities for Weapon Assembly/Disassembly Operations," dated July 15, 1997, is a beginning of the effort to establish procedures to more effectively prioritize Pantex facility selection by capabilities with respect to specific weapons program operational hazards. Continued discussions in this area between Board staff and Pantex Plant personnel (both Department and contractor) would be beneficial in refining this procedure. By January 1, 1998, we will provide you the results of this effort and a report of its applications to operations within Pantex. At the same time, we will report on our investigation per your request, to address the feasibility and merit of moving the dismantlement of W69 units to a superior Pantex facility in the near future.

If you have any questions, please contact me or have your staff contact David Chaney at 301903-8308.

Sincerely,

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