

[DNFSB LETTERHEAD]

April 2, 1997

The Honorable Federico Peña
Secretary of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-1000

Dear Secretary Peña:

Technical competence of workers is essential to operational safety at the Department of Energy (DOE) defense nuclear facilities. Congress, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board), and other external agencies have long emphasized the need for improving the technical competence of both Federal and contractor personnel in the defense nuclear complex. In June 1993, the Board focused DOE's attention on this issue via Recommendation 93-3, *Improving DOE Technical Capability in Defense Nuclear Facilities Programs*. Since that time, DOE has made considerable progress on several aspects of this issue pursuant to the approved Implementation Plan (IP) for Recommendation 93-3.

However, DOE has not yet achieved all of the improvements envisioned in this IP. Despite the fact that all actions included in the IP were to be completed by December 1995, DOE and Board staff recently conducted a comprehensive review of the IP and reached the joint conclusion that approximately 40 percent of the IP commitments have not been met or have not achieved the desired effect. Of particular concern is the continued viability of efforts initiated under this IP that the Board considers critical to improving DOE technical competence, including the evaluation of key technical personnel, the Technical Leadership Development (Intern) Program, and excepted service authority for DOE hiring programs. The Board also notes that the mission, resources, and personnel constraints affecting DOE have changed significantly since this IP was developed.

Therefore, the Board requests that DOE revise the IP for Recommendation 93-3 to reflect current DOE initiatives, to address those actions that have not achieved the desired effect, and to provide realistic deliverables/milestones for commitments that remain open under the existing IP. The Board's staff is available to meet with your staff to enable the preparation of an acceptable revision.

Sincerely,

John T. Conway
Chairman

c: The Honorable Thomas P. Grumbly
The Honorable Archer L. Durham
Mr. Thomas W. Evans
Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.