



The Secretary of Energy  
Washington, DC 20585

November 20, 1998

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:

Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) Recommendation 98-1, issued on September 28, 1998, recommends improvements to the Department's program for resolving the findings of its independent internal safety oversight organization. I agree that such improvements will enhance our ability to ensure safety. Thus, the Department accepts Board recommendation 98-1.

The Department is committed to having an effective internal, independent oversight function as part of an overall safety assurance approach that also includes line management self-assessments. The Department's policy on line environment, safety and health oversight clearly establishes our expectations that robust, rigorous and credible contractor self-assessments together with Department line management oversight provide the primary basis for ensuring safety. Concurrently, the Department's Office of Oversight is responsible for independent safety oversight. Its findings are communicated to line management through inspection reports (such as safety management evaluations), topical and issue reviews, special studies, and accident investigations. Adequate and timely resolution of safety findings is the responsibility of line management, which has overall responsibility for performing work safely, gathering and considering safety feedback, and making necessary improvements. By acting on the Board's recommendation, we expect to further clarify these roles and responsibilities, and promote effective communication between line management and the independent oversight organization. Both are essential to the effective resolution of identified oversight findings.

The Department has completed a preliminary analysis of the issues raised in the Board's recommendation, and has identified the following as the foundation and focus of our implementation plan.

- The plan will describe a consistent, disciplined framework for developing and implementing corrective action plans in response to oversight findings, tracking and reporting status of corrective actions, verifying the completion of corrective actions, and resolving differences or issues that may arise relative to corrective actions. Department directives will be revised to implement the necessary framework.
- The role of the Office of the Secretary in resolving differences or issues that may arise in response to independent oversight findings will be clarified through enhancements to existing Department directives.

I have asked Ms. Ellen Livingston-Behan, Senior Program Advisor to the Office of the Secretary, to serve as the responsible manager for this recommendation. As the principal point of contact with the Board for this recommendation, she will work with you and your staff to develop an acceptable implementation plan that meets our mutual expectations. If you have questions, please contact her at (202) 586-9500.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Richardson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bill Richardson