



The Secretary of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

August 5, 2002

The Honorable John T. Conway
Chairman
Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board
625 Indiana Avenue, NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20004-2901

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Last year the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board addressed the Department of Energy's electrical safety programs, and raised concerns about whether contractors' electrical safety programs were making sufficient progress to be consistent with the guidance provided in the DOE handbook, *Electrical Safety* (DOE-HDBK-1092-98). The Board also encouraged the Department of Energy (DOE) to revise the handbook in several areas. We are taking a number of actions to respond to these concerns.

First, we are updating the DOE *Electrical Safety* handbook. The Department agrees with your staff that the DOE *Electrical Safety* handbook provides effective guidance on how to establish and implement adequate electrical safety programs, including how to deal with nonlisted electrical equipment. This handbook also adopts and endorses appropriate national consensus standards. I expect our contractors to be familiar with and work to current codes and standards in this area. However, as currently configured, the handbook specifically references and cites many electrical codes and standards that are revised continuously. As a result, we have found it difficult to maintain an up-to-date listing of these specific references and it needs to be revised to make it more current.

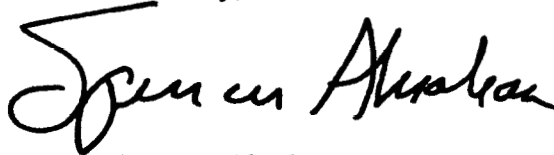
The Department is revising the handbook to delete specific references to codes and standards and make the handbook (a) a generic reference guide to appropriate codes and standards, (b) a guidance document for effective electrical safety programs, and (c) a document providing guidance for unique DOE work environments not specifically addressed in national consensus standards. The revised handbook will include a new chapter, "Underground Utilities Detection Equipment During Excavation," as the Board suggested. However, based on discussions with you and your staff, we agree that unique guidance on electrical safety during decontamination and decommissioning activities is not warranted at this time. Applying appropriate national consensus standards to all DOE activities should assure an adequate electrical safety program for all of our work. The revised handbook as specified above will take about one year to complete and we will work with your staff on this revision.



Enclosed for your information are reports prepared by the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Oak Ridge Operations Office/Y-12, Pantex, and the Savannah River Site. These reports discuss specific improvements to each site's electrical safety program. Particularly noted is the progress in these programs to identify existing noncompliant and nonlisted electrical equipment. The Department plans to continue to monitor progress at these and other sites to ensure that adequate electrical safety programs are in place at every defense nuclear facility.

I would like to thank you and your staff for your continuing interest and information on electrical safety matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Spencer Abraham". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "A".

Spencer Abraham

4 Enclosures

cc: J. Gordon, NA-1
M. Whitaker, S-3.1
J. Decker, SC-1
W. Magwood, NE-1
J. Roberson, EM-1