

John T. Conway, Chairman
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DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

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July 9, 2003

The Honorable Spencer Abraham
Secretary of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-1000

Dear Secretary Abraham:

The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) has received the Department of Energy's (DOE) Implementation Plan for the Board's Recommendation 2002-2, *Weapons Laboratory Support of the Defense Nuclear Complex*. Recommendation 2002-2 stresses the need to reemphasize the priority of weapons laboratory activities that directly support the defense nuclear complex and to clarify lines of communication regarding safety-related issues. The commitments and path forward outlined in the Implementation Plan adequately address the issues raised in Recommendation 2002-2. The Board therefore accepts the proposed Implementation Plan. Acceptance is predicated on the assumption that adequate funding will be provided to execute the commitments therein.

Essential to Recommendation 2002-2 is the priority of those activities that directly support the defense nuclear complex. Reemphasizing the fact that the nuclear weapons program is the laboratories' top priority will help ensure the long-term viability of a workforce that is qualified and available to address stockpile safety issues. The Board has commended DOE for those steps it has taken to establish succession, mentoring, and training programs to capture needed expertise before it is lost from the complex.

However, more must be done to ensure that personnel working in the complex are building expertise and career paths that will make them qualified and keep them available to meet the stockpile challenges of tomorrow. Technical personnel at the weapons laboratories must understand that developing expertise directly applicable to the stockpile is an essential part of a highly successful career path in the defense nuclear complex. The Board looks forward to working with you as this Implementation Plan is executed in the continuing effort to realize this requirement.

Sincerely,

John T. Conway
Chairman

c: The Honorable Linton Brooks
Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.