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DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

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December 15, 2004

The Honorable Linton Brooks
Administrator
National Nuclear Security Administration
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-0701

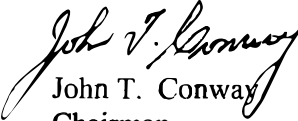
Dear Ambassador Brooks:

The special tooling program at the Pantex Plant plays a vital role in the overall safety of nuclear explosive operations. Due to the longstanding and recurring nature of tooling program failures at the Pantex Plant, as communicated to you in the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board's (Board) letter of June 18, 2004, the Board requested that the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) perform a comprehensive review of quality assurance as it affects the tooling program. Prior to the conduct of this NNSA review, the contractor had completed a majority of the corrective actions previously identified to address problems in this area. Even with the completion of these corrective actions, the NNSA review performed recently was suspended due to the number, variety, and type of findings.

The discovery of multiple failures in the various tooling program functional areas following completion of a majority of corrective actions indicates that, among other things, an inadequate causal analysis was performed prior to developing the corrective actions. The Board does not believe that a viable path forward exists to resolve these tooling problems and is convinced that effective involvement by both NNSA headquarters and the Pantex Site Office is necessary.

The Board remains concerned that the continuing weaknesses in the tooling program could have an adverse impact on the safety of nuclear explosive operations. Therefore, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 2286b(d), the Board requests that NNSA provide a report to the Board within 30 days that discusses (1) the impact of the continuing tooling problems on the safety of nuclear explosive operations at the Pantex Plant, (2) the compensatory measures in place that provide confidence that special tooling used in nuclear explosive operations will function as designed, and (3) the path forward to identify the root causes of the problems and resolve existing and newly identified tooling program deficiencies. The Board would like to be briefed on this report by NNSA after it is completed.

Sincerely,


John T. Conway
Chairman

c: Mr. Daniel E. Glenn
Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.