

John T. Conway, Chairman
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DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

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October 27, 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:

In Recommendation 93-6, *Maintaining Access to Nuclear Weapons Expertise in the Defense Nuclear Facilities Complex*, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) asked the Department of Energy (DOE) to identify a process for capturing the knowledge necessary to “develop or verify safe dismantlement or modification procedures specific to all remaining types of U.S. nuclear weapons.” As part of its archiving activities, in the revised Implementation Plan for Recommendation 93-6, DOE committed to developing a program for the capture and documentation of safety-related experience and knowledge that could affect safe weapons operations at the Pantex Plant, the Y-12 National Security Complex, and the Nevada Test Site. DOE also committed to using the Weapon Safety Specification (WSS) as a single-source document for all relevant safety-related information and to capturing requirements for the WSS in appropriate DOE procedures and directives.

During a recent visit to the Pantex Plant, the Board learned that the previous Pantex Plant contractor had ceased the archiving process shortly after the closure of Recommendation 93-6 in 1999. The archiving process at Pantex was intended to capture safety-related information through document research and through interviews with individuals currently or formerly associated with weapons programs in order to identify hazards associated with specific nuclear weapon assembly, disassembly, and surveillance operations. Although a manual for conducting these interviews was developed, it no longer is being used. This manual provided step-by-step guidance for conducting interviews with knowledgeable operations personnel, including production technicians. The resulting information was intended for possible incorporation into WSSs. According to a presentation made by BWXT Pantex to the Board, archiving was never accomplished at the Pantex Plant for several weapon systems.

At the Y-12 National Security Complex, interviews and archiving activities were carried out with technical and managerial personnel to elicit knowledge and experience on various design and operational issues and archive that information for future use. There are no indications that the Y-12 archiving program was continued past fiscal year 1997.

The Board is concerned that DOE is not supporting commitments made in response to Recommendation 93-6. Therefore, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 2286b(d), the Board requests a report within 90 days of receipt of this letter that provides a summary of which archiving activities planned during the development of the revised Implementation Plan for Recommendation 93-6 were actually completed, which have been institutionalized, and which were unaccomplished when the recommendation was closed. In the same report, the Board would also like an assessment of the quality of all WSSs and a schedule for updating any that are found to be deficient.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John T. Conway". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J".

John T. Conway

Chairman

c: Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.