

Department of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

February 3, 2004

ES03-014878

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

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The purpose of this letter is to provide an interim status on the actions taken in response to your letter to Secretary Abraham of December 2, 2003, regarding the glovebox fire that occurred in Building 371 at the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site (RFETS) on May 6, 2003, and deficiencies in the Integrated Safety Management System.

Specific to your December 2, 2003, letter, significant deficiencies in both the Rocky Flats Field Office (now Rocky Flats Project Office, RFPO) and Kaiser-Hill, LLC organizations allowed the fire event to occur, and have implications for overall safety management at the RFETS. Both the Department and Kaiser-Hill have reviewed your letter in detail and are moving fairly aggressively. The RFPO manager took the deliberate decision to shape the analysis across a broader scope to identify common elements of failure and is taking steps to strengthened the RFPO oversight.

Kaiser-Hill has also initiated multiple independent assessments to address technical questions related to the fire event, and also programmatic issues regarding Integrated Safety Management. Although considerable progress has been made in sixty days, the full causal analysis and corrective action plan development process is not complete. Although not yet complete, I am including the Kaiser-Hill response to the RFPO as part of this interim response to your letter. Similarly, the RFPO causal analysis and corrective action plan is included.

Programmatic weaknesses have been identified that infiltrated the RFPO oversight program and inhibited their ability to provide an effective and appropriate degree of safety oversight. These weaknesses were manifest in the form of reduced quantity of technical assessments, degraded formality of oversight (i.e., modes of communicating issues, tracking issues and corrective actions, etc.), and the lack of a comprehensive assessment plan. In addition, our approach to improving the implementation of the RFETS work control process was flawed. Although the site made conscientious efforts to meet the commitment to the Board regarding work control, the methodology employed



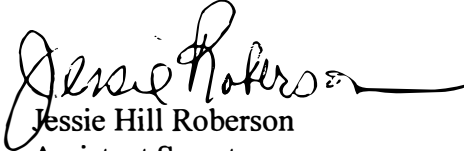
proved to be ineffective. The corrective actions delineated in the enclosure are focused on correcting programmatic issues that have implications for site activities through closure, rather than the specific symptoms, and will result in improved RFPO safety oversight. Likewise, the Kaiser-Hill corrective action plan satisfies the expectations in that it is built from a top-down philosophy looking ahead to project completion, and firmly commits senior management to reinforce and strengthen the safety culture at the site.

On a broader level, an independent review team has been chartered to identify and examine Department of Energy (DOE) wide events associated with fires involving radioactive materials. The objective is to understand what factors contribute to the occurrences of these fires as well as the Department's performance at taking effective corrective action to prevent these types of occurrences.

Additionally, based on the very powerful insights we have already gained from review of the Rocky Flats fire we are reinforcing our oversight of contractor's activities. We require significant events to be reported to the Acting Chief Operation Officer on a real time basis. Each event is discussed with the field manager to ensure a thorough review and follow up. The Safety Metrics we have identified for monitoring are tracked and discussed with all the field managers on a weekly basis. Complex wide trends are reviewed. Additionally, each DOE field manager reporting to me has signed up to performance expectations that require an average of eight hours per week in the facilities. Each field manager has also agreed to safety improvements tailored to their specific site and performance issues. The recent reorganization has helped to strengthen the ability of Headquarters to provide oversight.

We will continue to keep the Board staff informed of progress being made on the actions addressing your concerns. Also, the Department will provide the final response to your December 2, 2003 letter by April 1, 2004. If you have any questions concerning the Rocky Flats efforts please call me at (202) 586-7709 or Inès Triay, Deputy Chief Operating Officer, at (202) 586-0738.

Sincerely,


Jessie Hill Roberson
Assistant Secretary
for Environmental Management

Enclosures (3)

cc: Mark Whitaker, DR-1
Frazier Lockhart, RFPO

- (1) [Corrective Action Plan for Self-Assessment & Causal Analysis of Safety Oversight Program](#)
- (2) [RFPO Self-Assessment & Causal Analysis of the Safety Oversight Program](#)
- (3) [Kaiser-Hill Comprehensive Corrective Action Plan](#)