



The Secretary of Energy
Washington, D.C. 20585

May 9, 2006

MEMORANDUM FOR ALL DEPARTMENTAL ELEMENTS

FROM:

SAMUEL W. BODMAN

SUBJECT:

Relations with the Defense Nuclear Facilities
Safety Board

I want to make certain that all of you understand my view on the proper relationship between the Department and the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB). The responsibility of the DNFSB is to provide high-quality, technically competent external advice by: reviewing and evaluating standards; conducting investigations; analyzing design and operational data; reviewing facility design and construction; and, making recommendations. The DNFSB maintains a highly competent technical staff and has been a valuable asset to us in meeting our obligation to ensure the highest standard of nuclear safety.

The responsibility for the operation of the Department, however, belongs to us, and not the DNFSB. Our responsibility is to carry out our mission in a safe, secure, and environmentally responsible way. Blurring the distinction between our line responsibilities and the role of external reviewers both reduces the independence and effectiveness of the DNFSB and weakens our line responsibility. Our obligation is to do what is right and accept responsibility for the outcome. Our decisions should be risk-informed, not based on avoiding risks altogether. When we appear to allow any outside group to make our decisions, we are not meeting that obligation and are abdicating our responsibility.

The Department has made a number of formal commitments to the DNFSB. I expect us to be meticulous in observing those commitments unless and until they are formally changed. I also expect us to fully discharge our legal obligation of ensuring that the DNFSB has access to all information needed to carry out its duties. Finally, I expect us to pay attention to the advice of the DNFSB and its staff. Sound technical advice—both formal and informal—is always valuable but we must never confuse advice with authority and accountability.

As we continue to improve management of the Department, we must constantly keep in mind the importance of both line accountability and clarity in roles and responsibilities. I expect line managers to make sound technical decisions, drawing on all available information, including advice and observations from the DNFSB. Doing so does not lessen our commitment to safety. Instead, it reinforces that commitment, emphasizing our responsibilities rather than hiding behind the judgment of others.



For decades, the Naval Reactors Program has been seen as a model of both strong line management and exemplary nuclear safety. Over forty years ago, the creator of that program, the late Admiral Hyman Rickover, wrote these words:

"Responsibility is a unique concept... You may share it with others, but your portion is not diminished. You may delegate it, but it is still with you.... If responsibility is rightfully yours, no evasion, or ignorance or passing the blame can shift the burden to someone else. Unless you can point your finger at the man who is responsible when something goes wrong, then you have never had anyone really responsible."

I believe in this philosophy. I look to the line managers throughout the Department to make the judgments on safety, security, environment, and mission that are crucial to meeting our obligations to the American people.