DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD
Washington, DC 20004-2901

October 15, 2025

The Honorable Timothy J. Walsh
Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-1000

Dear Assistant Secretary Walsh:

Congratulations on your confirmation as Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management! We look forward to a positive and productive working relationship with you and your team to further our shared commitment to the safe execution of the Department of Energy's (DOE) legacy radioactive waste cleanup and nuclear material management mission.

Congress established the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) in 1988 to provide independent analysis, advice, and recommendations to the Secretary of Energy and aid the Secretary in ensuring adequate protection of public health and safety at the DOE's defense nuclear facilities.

On February 14, 2025, the Board sent a letter to the Secretary of Energy highlighting key safety challenges facing defense nuclear facilities across the nuclear security enterprise. The enclosure provides an updated list of safety challenges involving defense nuclear facilities operated by the Office of Environmental Management.

We look forward to meeting you at your earliest opportunity to discuss shared interests in safe mission execution and effective engagement on safety at Environmental Management defense nuclear facilities.

Our point of contact for meeting coordination is Chief of Staff, Mr. Kyle Johnson, who can be reached at kyle.johnson@dnfsb.gov or 202-701-8964.

Sincerely,

Thomas A. Summers

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Acting Chairman

Enclosure

c: The Honorable Chris Wright, Secretary of Energy
Mr. Joe Olencz, Director, Office of the Departmental Representative to the Board

Enclosure: Safety Issues at Office of Environmental Management Defense Nuclear Facilities

Board Recommendations and Other Notable Nuclear Safety Issues

Recommendation 2023-1—Onsite Transportation Safety.

Department of Energy (DOE) sites frequently perform on-site transport of radioactive materials between defense nuclear facilities. Issued in January 2024, this recommendation identified significant safety issues with the Los Alamos National Laboratory's transportation safety document, stemming in part from weaknesses in the safe harbor directives that govern transportation safety document development. The Board's recommendation is intended to strengthen DOE's guidance related to onsite transportation of nuclear materials, which applies to all DOE sites.

Status

DOE accepted the recommendation and transmitted its implementation plan in October 2024. DOE submitted the first implementation plan deliverable, *Extent of Condition Summary Report*, via letter dated August 22, 2025, which contained the results of DOE's review of onsite transportation safety documents across eight sites, including the Hanford Site, Idaho Cleanup Project, Oak Ridge Environmental Management, and Savannah River Site. As noted in the report, the review identified inconsistencies in the DOE regulatory framework that should be corrected and concluded that the methodology for developing onsite transportation documents should be revised. The Board is encouraged by DOE's plans to revise the relevant directives, as outlined in DOE's Recommendation 2023-1 implementation plan.

Management of Aging Safety Infrastructure.

DOE's defense nuclear complex developed over an 80-year period, and many of the key facilities supporting the nation's nuclear security enterprise are more than four decades old. As a result, DOE's national security and radioactive waste remediation missions are dependent on the continued safe operation of aged defense nuclear facilities. In response to this complex-wide challenge, the Board has undertaken a campaign to assist DOE in strengthening its practices for managing aging safety infrastructure. As part of this ongoing campaign, the Board held a public hearing on August 14, 2024, to highlight best practices in aging management employed by organizations conducting high-hazard work across government and industry.

Status

Information from the hearing is being used to inform ongoing efforts to focus attention on aging infrastructure issues during safety oversight activities and to support further staff-to-staff interactions highlighting potential improvements to existing aging management practices. As an example of safety-related aging infrastructure concerns, the Board is working with DOE leadership to clarify plans and schedules for modernizing obsolescent escapeway hoists at the Waste Isolation Pilot

Plant (WIPP) as documented in a letter from the Board dated June 18, 2025. These hoists provide a vital means of emergency evacuation for workers operating in WIPP's underground defense nuclear facility. Continued progress in modernizing escapeway hoists and strengthening aging infrastructure management is vital to support WIPP's enduring role as the nation's sole geologic repository for transuranic waste.

Safe Disposition of Transuranic Waste.

DOE's mission to maintain the nuclear deterrent and carry out legacy cleanup activities creates transuranic waste that must be safely treated and disposed. During the last decade or so, DOE has experienced two significant safety events—one in 2014 at WIPP and another in 2018 at the Idaho National Laboratory (INL)—in which waste drums experienced energetic chemical reactions resulting in the release of radiological material. In response, the Board has been advising DOE to improve a key nuclear safety standard related to transuranic waste.

Status

DOE significantly improved the content of DOE Standard 5506, *Preparation of Safety Basis Documents for Transuranic Waste Facilities*. This standard provides guidance on analyzing hazards and selecting controls to ensure the safe handling and disposal of transuranic waste. Broadening implementation of this improved safety standard will promote safe execution of DOE's radioactive waste remediation mission.

Radioactive Liquid Waste Processing.

DOE's radioactive waste cleanup mission is crucial to enhancing public and worker safety across the enterprise. The Board's safety oversight has focused on conduct of operations and configuration management at radioactive liquid waste processing facilities at the Hanford Site and Savannah River Site.

Status

At the Hanford Site, DOE has safely commenced operation of the new Low Activity Waste Facility and resumed 242-A Evaporator campaigns following completion of work to support continued safe operation of this important facility. At the Savannah River Site, DOE has taken meaningful action to improve aspects of training and disciplined operations at the Defense Waste Processing Facility after experiencing challenges in these areas during the last two years. The Board is optimistic that planned actions will drive a continued upward performance trend. These successes represent significant progress in DOE's cleanup mission.