

March 5, 2001

General John A. Gordon
Administrator of the National
Nuclear Security Administration
Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-0701

Dear General Gordon:

The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) has reviewed the Enhanced Transportation Cart (ETC) Project Plan, which was submitted in support of Commitment 4.3.7 in the Department of Energy's (DOE) Implementation Plan for the Board's Recommendation 98-2, *Safety Management at the Pantex Plant*. The ETC concept appears to be an appropriately engineered solution for the safe transport of partial nuclear explosive assemblies and physics packages at the Pantex Plant.

However, the Board was dismayed by the elaborate plan that DOE encouraged or allowed its contractor to develop for such a relatively simple project. Further, the schedule for deploying this piece of equipment does not reflect the relative simplicity of the equipment or the risk reduction that DOE seeks to attain.

The Board's Recommendation 98-2 highlighted the need to simplify and expedite the Seamless Safety for the 21st Century (SS-21) process at the Pantex Plant. The plan to deliver two transportation carts is scheduled to take longer than the completion of an entire SS-21 development project for a weapon program.

The receipt and inspection of the first ETCs (partial assembly type) at the Pantex Plant is not scheduled until October 2002. Furthermore, the design and procurement cycle for the second group of ETCs (physics package type) is longer than that of the first. Lessons learned during the first ETC procurement cycle should shorten, not lengthen, the development and procurement period for the second group. Finally, the project plan includes several rebaselining tasks that portend further delays in

an already overlong schedule.

General John A. Gordon

Page 2

Overall, the ETC Project Plan does not provide for expeditious implementation of the design, fabrication, and operational acceptance of equipment important to safety and does not meet the intent of the Board's Recommendation 98-2. The Board urges DOE to revise the plan to expedite the design, procurement, and delivery of the ETCs to meet the intent of the Board's Recommendation 98-2.

Sincerely,

John T. Conway
Chairman

c: Brigadier General Thomas F. Gioconda
Mr. David E. Beck
Mr. Richard E. Glass
Mr. Daniel E. Glenn
Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.