

January 28, 2002

The Honorable Francis S. Blake  
Deputy Secretary of Energy  
1000 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20585-1000

Dear Mr. Blake:

Since 1995, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) has urged the Department of Energy (DOE) to update the Nuclear Air Cleaning Handbook, ERDA 76-21 (Handbook). The Handbook, last revised in 1976, provides important guidance on the design and maintenance of ventilation systems for defense nuclear facilities. DOE committed in the Implementation Plan for Recommendation 2000-2, *Configuration Management, Vital Safety Systems*, to place a draft revision of the Handbook into the directives system for DOE-wide review by December 2001. DOE further committed to issue the revised Handbook by November 2002.

Recent DOE occurrences and Board reviews have pointed to continued weaknesses associated with confinement ventilation systems that may have been avoided had the Handbook been up-to-date. These weaknesses include outdated High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filter field-testing guidance, confusing HEPA filter receipt inspection requirements, and reference to outdated ventilation design standards. An updated Handbook may have helped preclude a recent repeat occurrence involving a fire in equipment used to test HEPA filters and the rejection of a large number of HEPA filters during receipt inspection at the Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The Board has been informed recently that a draft revision of the Handbook is now not expected until April 2002. Although final publication is presumably still expected by November 2002, the lack of progress in developing a draft revision makes this unlikely. The Board brings this matter to your attention because it believes it is important to minimize any further delays in revising the Handbook. As such, the Board would like to be informed of those actions DOE plans to take to issue this Handbook revision in a timely manner.

Sincerely,

John T. Conway  
Chairman

c: Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.