

July 17, 2002

The Honorable Spencer Abraham
Secretary of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue
Washington, DC 20585-1000

Dear Secretary Abraham:

The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) has reviewed the findings and recommendations of the Department of Energy (DOE) Fire Commission on Safety and Preparedness issued May 28, 2002. The Commission's recommendations are consonant with fire safety issues that have been raised by the Board over the years and summarized in DNFSB/TECH-27, "Fire Protection for Defense Nuclear Facilities." The Board stated in the cover letter for TECH-27, ". . . fire is often the dominant public-risk accident at the Department of Energy's (DOE) nuclear facilities. . . fires are a major source of risk to workers and can quickly lead to fatalities. . . ." Since the issuance of TECH-27 in June of 2000, it has also become clear that wildfires can pose a threat to some defense nuclear facilities. Some of the Commission's observations and recommendations focus on that important safety concern.

The Board is aware that the Commission's recommendations were responded to favorably by DOE at the Commission's final public hearing on July 9, 2002. However, no coordinated action plan was proposed to study and, where appropriate, implement the Commission's recommendations. This raises the possibility that the work of the Commission, which received the Board's full support and cooperation, may not be fully utilized by DOE.

For that reason, the Board requests, pursuant to 42 U. S. C. § 2286b(d), that DOE provide a report to the Board within 60 days outlining the specific actions DOE will take to implement, where appropriate, the recommendations of the DOE Commission on Fire Safety and Preparedness as they may affect defense nuclear facilities.

Sincerely,

John T. Conway
Chairman

c: Mr. Mark B. Whitaker