

May 25, 2000

The Honorable T. J. Glauthier
Deputy Secretary of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-1000

Dear Mr. Glauthier:

The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) has been following the upgrading of the Department of Energy's (DOE) lessons learned programs. Enclosed for your information is a report prepared by the Board's staff on a recent meeting of the DOE Society for Effective Lessons Learned Sharing. It appears that DOE and its contractors have been making good progress toward developing the infrastructure necessary to support their lessons learned programs since a letter from the Board to Deputy Secretary Moler, dated March 20, 1998, raised issues concerning these programs.

Despite this progress, however, the Board is concerned that the programs, in most cases, remain ineffective. Implementation of these programs appears to have received less attention from line managers than other Integrated Safety Management (ISM) functions, such as the analysis of hazards and implementation of controls. The future success of ISM will depend in large measure on the strength of the feedback and improvement core function, in which lessons learned play a significant role.

The Board believes the development and implementation of DOE's lessons learned programs require renewed focus by line managers responsible for the effectiveness of ISM. The Board intends to pursue this topic further with line managers at its upcoming public meeting on Recommendation 95-2.

Sincerely,

John T. Conway
Chairman

c: Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.
Mr. Theodore A. Wyka, Jr.

Enclosure

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

Staff Issue Report

May 11, 2000

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. K. Fortenberry, Technical Director

COPIES: Board Members

FROM: M. Moury

SUBJECT: Meeting of Department of Energy Society for Effective Lessons Learned Sharing, April 5–6, 2000

Members of the staff of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) attended the spring meeting of the Department of Energy's (DOE) Society for Effective Lessons Learned Sharing (SELLS) on April 5–6, 2000. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the status of lessons learned programs, share program implementation experiences, and plan any future actions for the group. DOE and contractor lessons learned coordinators from DOE and its contractors across the complex and representatives from the commercial industry were in attendance. The commercial representatives' presentations and participation added greatly to the value of the meeting.

DOE's lessons learned program is a key element of the feedback and improvement core function of Integrated Safety Management. The program encompasses analysis and correction of deficiencies that affect the protection of the public, workers, and the environment, and sharing of lessons learned from these actions to improve safety in other work activities. DOE has made significant progress toward setting up a lessons learned infrastructure since the Board's letter of March 20, 1998, raised issues concerning DOE's lessons learned program. This progress includes updating the lessons learned standard, revising the *Functions, Responsibilities and Authorities Manual*, and implementing a Web-based lessons learned database for use across the complex. Despite these improvements, however, it does not appear that many programs are highly effective.

A February 18, 2000, memorandum from the Safety Management Implementation Team Director to the Program Secretarial Officers and Field Office Managers emphasized three keys to making the lessons learned program work:

- Strong, visible management support and involvement
- Identification of both positive and negative lessons
- Increased sharing of lessons learned, including management lessons, from site to site

During the meeting, it was clear from the discussions that most programs suffer from a lack of line management support and involvement. Other than personnel from DOE's Oakland Field Office, who had met to discuss lessons learned the day before this meeting, there was no other involvement of DOE or contractor management in the meeting. In addition, most programs have difficulty conveying applicable lessons learned to workers. There is generally poor follow-up on corrective actions that may emerge from a lessons learned program, and few sites use metrics for measuring the effectiveness of their programs.

Future actions identified during the meeting are focused on developing programs that will ensure more formal responses to safety-related lessons learned, and on making the lessons learned process more transparent by inserting relevant lessons into the work planning process with no need for action by workers. These measures offer the potential for correcting many of the weaknesses that characterize the lessons learned programs; however, management support and involvement remain critical to improving the programs' effectiveness.