

July 8, 1999

The Honorable Bill Richardson
Secretary of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-1000

Dear Secretary Richardson:

The results of recent reviews of chemical hazards assessments at the Y-12 Plant in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, are discussed in the two enclosed Issue Reports prepared by the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board's (Board) staff, which the Board is providing for your consideration. The Board considers that the major issues addressed in these reports—the contractor's tardy response to Secretary of Energy directives, the apparent failure of Department of Energy (DOE) management to take aggressive action to ensure timely response, the lack of up-to-date accurate information concerning the inventory of potentially hazardous chemicals, and DOE management's failure to follow up open occurrence reports and unresolved safety questions—warrant the attention of senior DOE managers.

The Board is mindful of the need for program managers to assign priorities, particularly in times of tight budgets. Nevertheless, the Board considers that deferral or cancellation of responses to explicit Secretarial directives is a serious matter requiring resolution at the highest levels of DOE management.

The Board would be interested in hearing what corrective actions may be taken to address these issues, and will be evaluating the extent to which they may be evident at other defense nuclear facilities.

Sincerely,

John T. Conway
Chairman

c: Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.

Enclosures