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## DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

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November 26, 1996

The Honorable Hazel R. O'Leary  
Secretary of Energy  
1000 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20585-1000

Dear Secretary O'Leary:

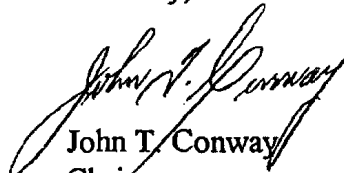
The Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site (RFETS) is preparing to stabilize plutonium presently contained in nitrate solutions in Building 371. Section 3133(a) of Public Law 102-190 provides that plutonium operations may not resume in this building until the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) is satisfied that the Department of Energy's (DOE) response to three specific Board recommendations is sufficient to ensure adequate protection of public health and safety.

The Board has reviewed the preparations by RFETS for tank draining and solution stabilization using the caustic waste treatment system, as well as the results of DOE's operational readiness review. This is an operation of limited duration involving solutions with a relatively low plutonium concentration. The solutions are contained in tanks and piping that were once part of the production process.

The Board has had its staff conduct independent reviews of the planned stabilization. Based on the reviews to date, the Board has determined that the Secretary's responses to Board Recommendations 90-2, 90-5, and 91-1, together with other actions taken at RFETS, are adequate to protect public health and safety with respect to startup of the caustic waste treatment system in Building 371. No additional Board determination is necessary before this solution stabilization processing in Building 371 begins. The Board will continue its oversight of DOE solution stabilization activities related to both worker and public health and safety.

Though the Board concurs with starting the stabilization as planned, it suggests that the process of stabilization should be completed by flushing the tanks being emptied, to promote readiness for ultimate remediation and disposal of the tanks without a need for further cleanup.

Sincerely,



John T. Conway  
Chairman

c: The Honorable Thomas P. Grumbly  
The Honorable Alvin L. Alm  
Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.  
Ms. Jesse Roberson