

**Department of Energy**

Washington, DC 20585

April 30, 1997

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DNF SAFETY BOARD

The Honorable John T. Conway
Chairman
Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board
625 Indiana Avenue, N.W.
Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The purpose of this letter is twofold. First, I would like to inform you of actions that the Department of Energy (Department) has taken related to the commitment in our letter of October 7, 1996, regarding diversification of the Peer Review Panel. Second, I would like to advise you of a revised completion date for the Headquarters' review of the Hanford 200 East Area Burial Ground Performance Assessment.

In your letter of August 20, 1996, to the Secretary regarding acceptance of the Department's Recommendation 94-2 Implementation Plan, Revision 1 (April 1996), you requested that the Department retain a commitment from the original implementation plan to strengthen the recusal process and diversify the low-level waste disposal facility performance assessment Peer Review Panel. The Department has recently established a federally-staffed group to review and make recommendations on acceptability of performance assessments and composite analyses. The group is composed of representatives from the Headquarters Offices of Waste Management (EM-30), Environmental Restoration (EM-40), and Environment (EH-4), and representatives from field organizations. This assemblage includes both personnel with technical expertise and personnel with policy and overall site management perspectives. This larger group with a broader background and perspective meets the intent of the commitment to diversify the Peer Review Panel.

In the group's initial meeting in April 1997, the members discussed the process by which future performance assessments and composite analyses would be managed. It was decided that the federally-staffed group would perform or manage all aspects of the technical and policy review of performance assessments and composite analyses starting with the Los Alamos National Laboratory Material Disposal Area G performance assessment which was submitted to Headquarters at the end of March 1997. Based on its review, the group would recommend to the appropriate Deputy Assistant Secretary whether the assessment was acceptable and whether any conditions should be imposed to provide a reasonable expectation of future protection of the public and environment. The existence of this group with its technical and policy background obviates the need for the Peer Review Panel. As such,

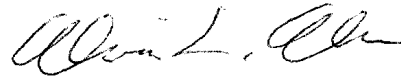


the panel will be disbanded following the review of the Hanford 200 East Area Burial Ground Performance Assessment (see below).

In the Recommendation 94-2 Implementation Plan, Revision 1, the Department committed to completing Headquarters' review of the Hanford 200 East Area Burial Ground Performance Assessment by the end of April 1997. The review had been put on hold while the participants for the federally-staffed group were being selected and the group was being assembled. During the group's February conference call, it was agreed that the Peer Review Panel should undertake a technical review of the performance assessment and report review results to Headquarters for the federally-staffed group's consideration. The Peer Review Panel has proceeded with its review of the performance assessment. In mid-March, the panel met and identified additional information or explanation necessary for the review to be completed. It was decided that the Richland Operations Office would provide the requested information in late April at which time the panel would meet again. We anticipate that the panel will be able to complete its review shortly after the meeting and provide its report to Headquarters. Therefore, we expect to complete the Headquarters' action on the performance assessment by May 30, 1997.

The Department has completed actions that meet the intent of the letter commitment to diversify the Peer Review Panel and recommends closure of that portion of the commitment.

Sincerely,



Alvin L. Alm
Assistant Secretary for
Environmental Management

cc: M. Whitaker, S-3.1