



Department of Energy
Savannah River Operations Office
P.O. Box A
Aiken, South Carolina 29802

OCT 28 1998

The Honorable John T. Conway
Chairman, Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board
625 Indiana Avenue, NW Suite 700
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Chairman Conway:

SUBJECT: Americium/Curium (Am/Cm) Stabilization Update

The purpose of this letter is to advise you on progress made relative to stabilization of Am/Cm solutions at the Savannah River Site (SRS). Since the May 7, 1998, public hearing, improvements have been implemented and good progress has been made in the fundamental structure and engineering approach for this project.

The work completed by the Westinghouse Savannah River Company (WSRC) has been reviewed and validated by my staff and an independent review team of outside laboratory and project management/engineering professionals. WSRC has completed sufficient proof of concept testing on a three-inch diameter melter, is making progress in development of work on the five-inch melter, and continues to pursue a back-up technology. Based on these reviews and progress, on October 8, 1998, I approved resumption of preliminary design on the Am/Cm vitrification project. Sufficient development work has not been completed to support re-baselining the project's overall schedule and cost. I anticipate that in February 1999 WSRC will have developed sufficient information for the Department of Energy (DOE) Savannah River Operations Office (SR) to approve work through 40% preliminary design thereby allowing the project to establish a realistic stabilization schedule and cost estimate by early summer 1999.

While we make progress on this project, we continue to assure safe storage of these materials pending ultimate stabilization. In this regard, SR is working with WSRC to resolve related infrastructure issues such as the reliability of the F-Canyon Process Vessel Ventilation blowers. In addition, the Department is working on plans for the future movement of the stabilized material to Oak Ridge (OR) for long-term storage and ultimate disposition. This is being done as part of the complex-wide management integration effort headed by Acting Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management (EM), Jim Owendoff. DOE-EM, DOE-SR, and DOE-OR management and technical staff are working to resolve issues concerning transportation and storage so that Oak Ridge will be ready to receive the Am/Cm material once stabilized.

We will continue to keep Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board staff informed of the progress in the Am/Cm stabilization work. If you have any questions about the Americium/Curium stabilization project please call me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Rudy".

Greg Rudy
Manager

cc: J. Owendoff, EM-1
J. Hall, MGR OR
M. Whitaker, S-3.1