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DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

99-0002425

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October 15, 1999

Mr. David E. Beck
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Military
Application and Stockpile Management
Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-0104

Dear Mr. Beck:

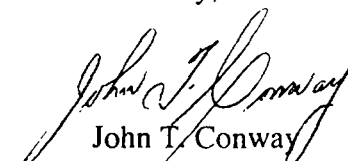
The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) recently received deliverable 5.5.1(c) of the Department of Energy's (DOE's) Implementation Plan for Recommendation 98-2, *Safety Management at the Pantex Plant*. This deliverable documents DOE's proposal regarding changes to the membership and structure of Nuclear Explosive Safety Study Groups (NESSGs).

The level of detail contained in this proposal is not yet sufficient for the Board to ascertain that the intent of its recommendation of NESSG membership has been adequately addressed. Therefore, the Board will examine the details of actual implementation of this proposal to see whether the resulting structure and operation of the NESSGs in the future will effectively use the knowledge and talents of the broad base of emeritus personnel who may be able to provide significant value to the reviews. The Board remains hopeful that DOE's proposal will result in a standing committee of highly-experienced personnel with significant stature in the nuclear weapons community or related ones (such as the commercial nuclear or explosive industries).

The Board is also concerned that the proposed structure of the NESSG may not adequately address the need to maintain a nuclear explosive safety program with competent, experienced personnel at the Nevada Test Site. Although nuclear explosive operations are not currently conducted at that site, the capability to develop and independently review safety bases for nuclear explosive safety operations should be an important part of DOE's program for test readiness and for any operations that may arise requiring disposal of damaged nuclear weapons at the Nevada Test Site.

The Board will continue to follow DOE's restructuring of the NESSGs and their membership. We look forward to discussing this matter with you in the near future. If you have any questions, please call.

Sincerely,


John T. Conway
Chairman

c: Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.