

# The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board

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## Strategic Plan FY 2026–2030

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September 29, 2025

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## DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

Washington, DC 20004-2901



### Message from the Board

Since its inception in 1988, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) has played a vital role in strengthening the safety framework that underpins our nation's nuclear deterrent capabilities. The Board's work, underpinned by its strong staff, exemplifies our responsibility to advance national security objectives by ensuring the Department of Energy (DOE) protects nuclear safety while maintaining mission readiness. This Strategic Plan describes how the Board will continue to fulfill its important mission through 2030 as nuclear safety challenges across the defense nuclear facility complex continue to evolve and accelerate with the increased demand for production of nuclear weapons and the continued progress on nuclear waste processing and disposal. The Board must continue to identify nuclear safety issues and communicate those safety issues to the Secretary of Energy to adequately protect public and worker health and safety through 2030.

This Strategic Plan incorporates the nation's priorities to ensure efficient and effective use of agency resources to achieve our statutory mission. For example, the DNFSB will continue to unlock the potential of Artificial Intelligence tools to enhance nuclear safety. The Board will also ensure that performance management focuses resources on achieving organizational goals per the Administration's priorities. The Board is committed to faithfully discharging its nuclear safety oversight mission in furtherance of public and worker health and safety to the benefit of national security.



#### **ACTING CHAIRMAN/ VICE CHAIRMAN**

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Mr. Thomas A. Summers

Term Expiring October 18, 2025



#### **BOARD MEMBER**

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Dr. Patricia L. Lee

Term Expiring October 18, 2027

## Introduction

Under the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, as amended, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB or Board) is charged with providing independent safety oversight of the Department of Energy's (DOE) defense nuclear facilities complex—a complex that designs, manufactures, tests, maintains, and decommissions nuclear weapons, as well as other national security priorities. The Act mandates that the Board review the content and implementation of DOE standards and facility and system designs, as well as events and practices at DOE defense nuclear facilities.

Congress established the Board in 1988 as an independent federal agency within the executive branch of government, answerable to the President and subject to congressional oversight and direction. Board members, appointed by the President and subject to confirmation by the Senate, are required to be “respected experts in the field of nuclear safety with a demonstrated competence and knowledge relevant to the independent investigative and oversight functions of the Board.” The Board is a collegial agency, meaning that its actions are determined by the Board as a whole.

The Board's essential mission is to provide independent analysis, advice, and recommendations to the Secretary of Energy to inform the Secretary, as operator and regulator of DOE defense nuclear facilities, in providing adequate protection of public health and safety. As noted above, the Board's jurisdiction covers DOE's “defense nuclear facilities” – a term defined in the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, as amended. The Board only is concerned with facilities operated by DOE that are: (1) covered by the Atomic Energy Act; and (2) have a function related to national defense. The phrase “defense nuclear facilities” excludes two major classes of government-regulated nuclear facilities: DOE's nuclear projects that are civilian in purpose, and commercial nuclear facilities regulated by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). The Board's safety oversight jurisdiction also does not extend to the U.S. Navy's nuclear propulsion program or to environmental hazards regulated by other federal and state agencies.

The Board's safety oversight mission covers the entire life cycle of a defense nuclear facility: design, construction, operation, and decommissioning. Congress granted the Board a suite of statutory tools to carry out its mission. Principal among these is the issuance of formal Board recommendations to the Secretary of Energy. The statute requires the Secretary to either accept or reject the Board's recommendation, and in the case of an acceptance, to write and execute an implementation plan. This entire process takes place on the public record. In cases involving an “imminent or severe threat” to the public health and safety, the statute requires the Board to also send its recommendation to the President, who makes the final decision on actions to be taken. In addition to recommendations, the Board is empowered to hold public hearings (and subpoena witnesses, if necessary), conduct investigations, establish reporting requirements to obtain information and documents needed for its work from DOE and its contractors, and review and comment on DOE requirements and standards affecting safety at defense nuclear facilities. DOE

is required by law to grant the Board “prompt and unfettered access to such facilities, personnel, and information as the Board considers necessary to carry out its responsibilities.” Finally, the statute authorizes the Board to seek assistance from other federal agencies and from organizations outside the government, as needed.



**Figure 1.** Major sites subject to DNFSB jurisdiction.

## **DNFSB Mission and Vision**

### **Mission (42 U.S.C. §2286a(a))**

The mission of the Board shall be to provide independent analysis, advice, and recommendations to the Secretary of Energy to inform the Secretary, in the role of the Secretary as operator and regulator of the defense nuclear facilities of the Department of Energy, in providing adequate protection of public health and safety at such defense nuclear facilities, including with respect to the health and safety of employees and contractors at such facilities.

### **Vision**

To secure a safe future for the American people through proven technical excellence and transparency that inspires public trust and confidence in the defense nuclear enterprise.

### **Values**

#### **Integrity**

- We observe the highest ethical standards in all aspects of our work.
- We uphold the highest ethical standards through honesty, openness, and personal accountability in all interactions and relationships.
- We take responsibility for our actions, honor our commitments, and communicate proactively when circumstances change.

#### **Respect**

- We treat everyone with fairness, dignity, and respect—valuing diverse perspectives and ensuring all voices are heard.
- We collaborate as one team, supporting and encouraging each other in pursuit of our shared mission.

#### **Excellence**

- We exhibit a passion for success, both individual and collective.
- We strive for excellence daily, holding ourselves and each other to the highest standards in everything we do.
- We foster a culture of encouragement and shared success, bringing out the best in ourselves and each other.

## **Independence**

- We maintain independence by relying on facts and professional judgment, free from outside influence.
- We seek and consider all relevant facts and perspectives before making objective, unbiased decisions.
- Our conclusions are well-documented, and our work is conducted with transparency and accountability.

## **Strategic Goals**

**Strategic Goal 1** Actively deliver independent safety oversight across the defense nuclear facilities complex to enhance public safety and national security while advancing the nation’s goals of a reliable nuclear deterrent and the safe disposal of nuclear waste.

**Strategic Goal 2** Enhance transparency of ongoing agency initiatives and the state of safety within the defense nuclear facilities complex.

**Strategic Goal 3** Develop and maintain an outstanding workforce to achieve the agency’s mission.

**Strategic Goal 4** Maximize the agency’s performance and results by pursuing excellence in our culture and operations.

## Strategic Goal 1

**Actively deliver independent safety oversight across the defense nuclear facilities complex to enhance public safety and national security while advancing the nation’s goals of a reliable nuclear deterrent and the safe disposal of nuclear waste.**

### **Strategic Objective 1.1 Complete timely, evidence-based analysis supporting advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Energy**

#### Overview and Implementation Strategy

The DNFSB will identify and prioritize nuclear safety reviews across the defense nuclear facility complex that maximize the positive impact on safety. The reviews will be conducted in accordance with the DNFSB statutory functions and authority. The DNFSB will utilize best practices and recognized nuclear safety standards in its analysis. Nuclear safety reviews will include cross-cutting issues that impact more than one defense nuclear facility and will include site-specific issues based on facility design and operations unique to particular facilities. The DNFSB will utilize the highly specialized technical expertise of its staff and conduct review activities and analysis both at its headquarters office and in the field.

### **Strategic Objective 1.2 Conduct high-quality safety reviews to identify discreet and complex-wide challenges and best practices at defense nuclear facilities**

#### Overview and Implementation Strategy

The DNFSB will provide DOE with objective, timely, technically accurate, and compelling safety information. By ensuring the quality of its safety reviews and analyses, the DNFSB will maximize the value of its nuclear safety advice to the Secretary and preserve the credibility of its reports.

Enhancing the DOE awareness of how safety challenges impact defense nuclear facilities across the complex allows greater efficiency and effectiveness in the Secretary’s regulation of nuclear safety. DNFSB will rely on the expertise of its technical staff and must ensure that the staff are adequately trained and experienced to handle the complexity of the nuclear safety reviews. An external factor that can impact the agency’s ability to achieve this objective is the ability to effectively recruit new technical staff with the required specializations necessary to conduct quality safety reviews and analysis.

## **Strategic Objective 1.3 Provide robust nuclear safety oversight in the field at defense nuclear facilities to identify and address emergent safety issues**

### Overview and Implementation Strategy

Utilizing the DNFSB's statutory authority, the agency places Resident Inspectors at key defense nuclear facilities to provide direct field safety oversight. These Resident Inspectors require prompt and unfettered access to DOE facilities, personnel, and information. The DNFSB augments its Resident Inspectors with site visits by headquarters staff and cognizant engineers assigned to cover safety oversight planning for a DOE site or a portfolio of topical areas. The on-site coverage enables identification of site-specific safety challenges. The staff providing this field coverage communicate emerging safety issues to the Board enabling quick action and communication to the Secretary. The field support relies on effective travel and communication technology. Effective field support also relies on the ability to recruit highly technical staff to geographic areas with lower cost-of-living pay adjustments. This external factor poses a challenge in recruiting staff with the necessary expertise and training to conduct field work with a high degree of independence.

## **Strategic Goal 2**

### **Enhance transparency of ongoing agency initiatives and the state of safety within the defense nuclear facilities complex**

## **Strategic Objective 2.1 Deliver transparency to the public and stakeholders regarding Board nuclear safety oversight activities and conclusions**

### Overview and Implementation Strategy

The DNFSB is subject to the Freedom of Information Act, the Government in the Sunshine Act and statutory reporting requirements to Congress. DNFSB will continue to deliver transparency to the public, Congress, and nuclear safety stakeholders by maintaining effective communications with its stakeholders. DNFSB posts on its public website weekly reports from Resident Inspectors and monthly reports from cognizant engineers. The DNFSB's positive impacts on safety across the defense nuclear facilities complex are summarized on the public website in easy-to-understand slides. The DNFSB will continue to provide briefings on relevant safety issues to its congressional authorizing and appropriations committees as well as congressional offices in states where defense nuclear facilities are located. The DNFSB will also continue to conduct and enhance its proactive public outreach to relevant state, local, and Tribal governments related to its nuclear safety oversight activities. Ensuring up-to-date understanding of nuclear safety standards, the DNFSB will also continue to maintain effective communications with relevant nuclear safety advocacy groups and technical organizations.

## **Strategic Objective 2.2 Effectively communicate with all levels of the Department of Energy**

### Overview and Implementation Strategy

The DNFSB relies on prompt and unfettered access to DOE facilities, personnel, and information to conduct its nuclear safety oversight mission. To ensure that the DNFSB technical staff and Board members have a comprehensive understanding of nuclear safety issues and DOE actions to address safety issues, the DNFSB will continue to maintain effective communications with the DOE at all organizational levels and to coordinate technical briefings from DOE on relevant nuclear safety topics.

## **Strategic Goal 3**

**Develop and maintain an outstanding workforce to achieve the agency’s mission.**

## **Strategic Objective 3.1 Foster and sustain a highly skilled workforce—both technical and administrative—by maintaining essential competencies and upholding the highest standards of technical excellence and professionalism in support of effective safety reviews and organizational performance.**

### Overview and Implementation Strategy

To enable the DNFSB to effectively identify and communicate nuclear safety issues across the vast defense nuclear facilities complex with a small number of employees, all DNFSB staff must comport with the highest standards of professionalism and technical excellence. The DNFSB must closely align its limited staffing allocation to agency objectives for mission accomplishment and maximize workforce capabilities and staff retention. This includes not only maintaining a cadre of highly trained technical experts but also sustaining a skilled and proficient administrative workforce that is essential to the agency’s operational efficiency and mission support.

In alignment with the President’s priorities, the agency will target hiring to fill mission essential positions with candidates having key skills, experience, education, and training.

## Strategic Goal 4

**Maximize the agency's performance and results by pursuing excellence in our culture and operations.**

### **Strategic Objective 4.1 Continually improve economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of mission support, encouraging innovation and collaboration across all levels of staff**

#### Overview and Implementation Strategy

The DNFSB is focused on accomplishing its statutory mission and improving organizational and individual performance through innovation and collaboration. The DNFSB will track its implementation of the President's policies and administrative agenda. It will ensure that internal operating procedures and work processes reflect a streamlined agency organization, current laws and regulations, and a nuclear safety culture. The DNFSB will follow Merit System Principles while preventing Prohibited Personnel Practices and complying with Equal Employment Opportunity requirements. Key to tying effective individual performance to organizational achievements, the DNFSB will implement OPM guidance on performance management and rewarding high performance consistent with the President's Executive Orders.

### **Strategic Objective 4.2 Modernize information technology systems and implement new technologies aligned with Administration priorities and federal standards**

#### Overview and Implementation Strategy

The DNFSB will implement the President's direction for all agencies to modernize information technology systems and deploy technologies to drive innovation within the agency. DNFSB will identify and implement tools and techniques to enhance efficiencies. Supporting the President's initiative to make America a leader in Artificial Intelligence (AI), the agency will partner with the General Services Administration to obtain and implement AI tools.

### **Strategic Objective 4.3 Strengthen agency management and performance by addressing challenges identified by the Office of the Inspector General**

#### Overview and Implementation Strategy

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) conducts several program reviews of the DNFSB annually. The results of these reviews provide valuable insights into performance areas that are strong and those that could be improved. The DNFSB will enhance agency performance through corrective actions addressing OIG recommendations. This will strengthen agency internal controls and remove obstacles to effective and efficient accomplishment of agency objectives.

## External Factors and Risks

At the date of this publication, the Board faces uncertainties that present some risk to achieving the outlined strategic goals.

The evolution of the DOE mission priorities and activities influences the safety oversight resources needed by the Board to support its mission. As DOE is called to increase nuclear weapons pit production, the need for maintaining focus on safety and to find and train qualified staff will increase in importance. The addition of the President's mandate to make America the global leader in small modular reactor energy production will draw staff and resources from across the nuclear business sector. DOE's waste treatment and disposal campaigns include increasingly complex waste streams and treatment methods. DOE will soon shift from storage to treatment of millions of gallons of highly-radioactive wastes in a first-of-a-kind, high-hazard processing facility. These shifts in DOE programs and priorities will require DNFSB to be agile in its nuclear safety oversight.

Recruiting and retaining highly qualified and specialized staff for technical nuclear safety oversight functions and for cross-cutting administrative functions has been a historical challenge for DNFSB. Additional external factors including increased competition across the nuclear sector may lead to shortages in staff necessary to carry out agency work.

The DNFSB faces the potential disruption to its operations due to the potential relocation of its headquarters office. While a relocation may provide some long-term savings in rental payments, having the required facility features necessary to safeguard classified national security information is paramount to the achievement of the DNFSB mission and of significant concern.

Of critical importance, DNFSB is currently operating under quorum saving procedures which expire in January 2026. In addition, the DNFSB faces the prospect of losing one of its two actively serving Board members, leaving the agency with only one Board member and no chairperson. Board members are appointed by the President for specified terms and are subject to Senate confirmation. They are required to be respected experts within the nuclear field and exercise expert technical judgement on which safety issues are elevated by the agency to the attention of the Secretary of Energy. The continued lack of a quorum and the near-term expiration of quorum saving measures, prevents the Board from exercising its most important nuclear safety functions under its statute.