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DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

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October 25, 1996

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

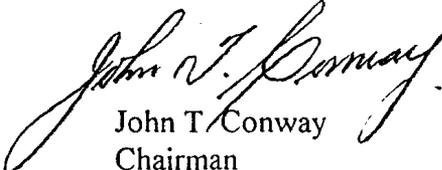
Dear Secretary O'Leary:

The Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site (RFETS) is preparing to stabilize plutonium presently contained in solution in Building 771. 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 solution stabilization using hydroxide precipitation and RFETS's readiness assessment. This is a glovebox operation of limited duration involving a relatively small quantity of plutonium solutions drained from tanks that were once part of the production process. The Board expects that lessons learned in preparing for stabilization of this relatively limited activity will serve as a basis for proper preparation for more hazardous future required undertakings at Building 771 and at other facilities at RFETS. The Board has emphasized through its recommendations the importance of making environmental, health and safety considerations at the activity level an integral part of work planning.

In this context, the Board had its staff conduct independent reviews of the planned stabilization and based on review to date, the Board has determined that the Secretary's response to Board Recommendations 90-2, 90-5, and 91-1, and other actions taken at the RFETS, are adequate to protect public health and safety with respect to resumption of the hydroxide precipitation process in Building 771. No additional Board determination is necessary prior to commencement of this solution stabilization processing in Building 771. The Board will continue its oversight of DOE solution stabilization activities related to worker and public health and safety.

Sincerely,


 John T. Conway
 Chairman

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