



96-0000729

Department of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

March 1, 1996

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DNF SAFETY BOARD

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

Dear Mr. Conway:

I appreciate your January 31, 1996, letter regarding concerns with startup and recent events at the In-Tank Precipitation (ITP) facility. I agree with the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board's (Board) assessment regarding the need for a better understanding of the complex chemistry involved. We are working with the Department of Energy Savannah River Operations Office (SR) to develop controls and mitigative actions to limit flammability levels to below 25 percent of the composite lower flammability level. We also agree with the Board's evaluation that SR staff are taking appropriate actions to address this concern.

A Justification for Continued Operations (JCO) has been approved by SR to allow slurry pump operation in Tank 48. My staff will continue to work closely with SR and the Board staff to ensure that any operations involving Tank 48 are conducted in a safe manner. This JCO will strictly be for depletion of the benzene inventory and will be authorized for a period not to exceed two months. Any future operations will be addressed by either changes to the Authorization Basis or another JCO. However, assurance of a complete understanding and control of the chemistry in the In-Tank Precipitation (ITP) process will be required prior to DOE authorizing further processing of high-level waste in ITP. Additionally, the potential impacts of this issue on all downstream high-level waste facilities and processes are being reviewed.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (202) 586-7745 or Ralph Erickson at (301) 903-7188.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Richard J. Guimond".

Richard J. Guimond
Assistant Surgeon General, USPHS
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Environmental Management