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DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

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May 15, 1996

The Honorable Thomas P. Grumbly
Under Secretary of Energy
Washington, D.C. 20585-1000

Dear Mr. Grumbly:

On February 7, 1996, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) sent the Secretary of Energy a letter and an associated technical report with respect to highly enriched uranium (HEU) processing at the Oak Ridge Y-12 Plant. The Board acknowledges your response by letter of April 9, 1996, on the same subject.

The Board agrees that there do not appear to be any "... imminent hazards [that] could arise within the next 2-3 years ..." and by comparison with plutonium residues in unstable form (Recommendation 94-1) corrective actions are not so urgent. The Board notes that in the Department of Energy's (DOE) Implementation Plan for the Board's Recommendation 94-1, it addresses the need for "... ultimate conversion of the uranium materials" and that "... uranium solutions will receive priority for aggressive disposition to safe, storable forms." Hence, we assume that the issue is not whether stabilization for safer storage is to be accomplished, but when.

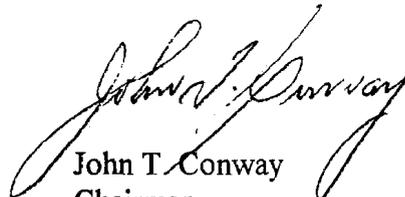
Your letter of April 9 advises that DOE will be conducting an HEU vulnerability assessment this summer. Such action is commended, but it is clear that the current status is not one to be maintained indefinitely. The Board believes that it is not advisable to allow HEU in the form of solutions, compounds, and metals to exist in Building 9212 in quantities larger or for time periods longer than necessary for operations. Moreover, it is not advisable for these materials to remain under storage conditions that could result in exposing workers, the public, and the environment to unnecessary risks. Action initiating development of a plan forward need not await a new vulnerability study.

It is the Board's understanding that there are plans for DOE to brief the Board on recent programmatic decisions that have been made concerning the restart of Building 9212. At that time, the Board would appreciate DOE discussing with us its planning for the processing and

further stabilization of Building 9212 "in-process" materials into a form that meets Y-12's standard for interim storage of HEU.

If members of your staff have any questions concerning the above, please have them contact Mr. Steve Krahn of the Board's staff.

Sincerely,



John T. Conway
Chairman

c: The Honorable Charles B. Curtis
The Honorable Tara O'Toole
The Honorable Victor H. Reis
Mr. Mark Whitaker
Mr. James Hall