

A.J. Eggenberger, Chairman
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DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

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July 21, 2005

The Honorable Linton Brooks
Administrator
National Nuclear Security Administration
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-0701

Dear Ambassador Brooks:

The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) was recently briefed at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) on the resumption of laboratory operations and on corrective action plans. The Board has the following observations for your information and use.

LANL is demonstrating a willingness to identify issues forthrightly, develop corrective action plans, and improve its operations. In particular, LANL is carrying out an Operational Efficiency project to address a number of institutional issues. This project encompasses eight subprojects on safety, quality assurance, software quality assurance, conduct of engineering, safety basis, operations, environmental risk management, and training. LANL intends to address other important site-wide issues, such as fire protection and nuclear materials management, outside of the Operational Efficiency project. LANL is also developing and implementing corrective action plans intended to address issues specific to each facility that were identified during the resumption process.

The Operational Efficiency project and related plans appear to be well conceived and are being implemented aggressively. The Board believes that full implementation is critical and will require the dedication of significant resources for several years. Management attention will be required and mechanisms must be put in place to ensure the sustainability of the gains that are made.

Within the Operational Efficiency project, the safety subproject, which builds on the Integrated Work Management initiative, has the greatest potential to directly improve worker safety and ought to be assigned appropriately high priority. LANL is requiring more rigor in work planning, including hazards identification and control, with an emphasis on shifting to a more structured and deliberate process that is more standards-based and less expert-based. While these changes appear appropriate, it is also important to remember that workers have to implement the improvements. Therefore, LANL must maintain a strong cadre of safety professionals, work supervisors, and principal investigators who understand this initiative and can apply their expertise at the activity-level.

The importance of improving work planning and control is recognized across all National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) sites—the Board highlighted this issue in a letter dated May 21, 2004. LANL, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, and Sandia National Laboratories all have work control initiatives underway. Given the similarities between their issues and operating environments, the three laboratories in particular would benefit from closer collaboration. Such collaboration should provide an opportunity to enhance the efforts at all three laboratories related to improving work planning and control.

The Board encourages NNSA to make certain that adequate resources are available for full implementation of corrective action plans emerging from the LANL resumption process—particularly for the Integrated Work Management initiative. Further, NNSA must ensure that rigorous change control is maintained so that the effectiveness of corrective action plans are fully realized.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. J. Eggenberger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

A. J. Eggenberger
Chairman

c: Mr. Thomas P. D'Agostino
Mr. Edwin L. Wilmot
Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.