

August 6, 2004

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) sent two letters to you and your staff, dated April 4, 2003, and July 9, 2003, regarding the status of training and qualification programs at National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) sites. The response from the Deputy Administrator for Defense Programs, dated October 2, 2003, acknowledged that several site offices—at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL), and the Nevada Test Site (NTS)—lacked compliant training and qualification programs, and therefore could not validate the adequacy of their contractor's training and qualification programs. The Nevada Site Office (NSO), in particular, was "in the process of implementing procedures and processes for nuclear work including training. NSO indicated that they will be in compliance with [Department of Energy Order] 5480.20A in the Device Assembly Facility by the end of 2003, and for the subcritical experiments by the end of 2004."

In an update on April 27, 2004, the Deputy Administrator reported that the Device Assembly Facility training evaluation, scheduled for October 2003, had slipped to May 2004. NSO made the commitment that, even if the schedule changed again, the training evaluation would be completed no later than June 1, 2004.

The Board has learned that high level evaluations conducted by the Los Alamos Site Office (LASO) during the past several months at LANL have uncovered significant deficiencies in training and qualification, and that further evaluations are required to fully understand the issues involved. The Deputy Administrator informed the Board in a letter dated June 4, 2004, that the LLNL evaluation has been delayed until August 6, 2004. A similar letter dated July 15, 2004, stated that the NTS training evaluation will be delayed until late August 2004. Further, instead of performing a dedicated evaluation, NSO intends to conduct the training and qualification evaluation as part of an Operational Readiness Review.

The Board finds this situation unacceptable. NNSA's senior managers have been aware of this situation for more than a year, yet, with the exception of LASO, efforts to begin defining the boundaries of the problem are only now being initiated. Corrective actions, contingent upon completion of the evaluations, have been inexcusably delayed at all three sites. The need for more immediate action on this issue is evident. Examples include the inadequacies in the training and qualifications of personnel conducting the Armando subcritical experiment, identified during the NNSA Readiness Assessment, and the results of the high level training evaluations at LANL.

Therefore, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 2286b(d), the Board requests that, within 45 days of receipt of this letter, NNSA provide the results of thorough, sitewide evaluations of the training and qualification programs at LANL, LLNL, and NTS in accordance with DOE Standard 1070-94. Further, the Board requests that within 30 days of completion of these evaluations, NNSA representatives brief the Board on the corrective action plans designed to address any findings.

Sincerely,

John T. Conway
Chairman

c: The Honorable Everet H. Beckner
Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.