



Department of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

July 14, 2000

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

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This letter responds to your letter of May 24, 2000, and the enclosed Staff Issue Report regarding the recovery of Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) from the Cerro Grande fire. I certainly agree with your observation of the high level of worker morale, professionalism, competence, and commitment to safety shown by the Department and its contractors in their response to the fire. We are all very thankful that we had no personal injuries during facility recovery, and that damage or loss of facilities and equipment was relatively minor.

At this time, the vast majority of Laboratory facilities have resumed full operations after developing and implementing facility recovery plans and management self-assessments for programmatic work resumption. This was a major undertaking, and the cooperation of Department and Laboratory personnel was critical to its success. The fact that so few problems surfaced during the recovery phase reinforces the notion that good decisions were made during the planning and execution stages of recovery.

We did note the concern raised in the Staff Issue Report regarding examination of critical electrical and electronic systems to determine the potential for smoke damage which may not be evident under visual inspection. At this time, no smoke-related damage to critical electrical or electronic systems has been identified. Los Alamos Area Office and Laboratory staff will continue to monitor for indications of smoke damage, visually inspect for signs of smoke-related damage during planned maintenance and surveillance activities on critical electrical and electronic systems, and take action where appropriate. Guidance for surveillances was issued by the Facility Recovery Center early on during the facility recovery process, Recovery records indicate very few facilities were affected due to proper implementation of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning shutdown and restart procedures. A LANL notice is being drafted by the Facility & Waste Operations Systems, Engineering and Maintenance Division, regarding additional monitoring during maintenance activities,

I also want to comment on the actions being taken to mitigate the effects of erosion and the potential for flooding resulting from the loss of vegetation. As noted in the Staff Issue Report, the Burned Area Rehabilitation Team, directed by the U. S. Forest Service, with the cooperation and support of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, LANL, and DOE, has worked expeditiously to mitigate the effects of erosion, and to minimize risks from additional fires and flooding.

The Laboratory has established an Emergency Rehabilitation Team. The Engineering Implementation Team has developed a set of plans and procedures to assure Quality Management and Integrated Safety Management Implementation during mitigation design and implementation and setting of design criteria. These procedures are being used jointly by LANL, the Corps of Engineers, and subcontractors involved in the preventative measures. Efforts in this are not complete, but we are optimistic that our actions will be effective in preventing further loss of property or environmental impact. If your staff would like further information or updates on these activities, they should contact the Los Alamos Area Office.

I appreciate your interest in the safe, long-term recovery of program operations at LANL, and I have asked my staff to continue to work with your staff so that they are routinely updated on progress. If you wish, please do not hesitate to contact me directly on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Thomas F. Gioconda". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'T'.

THOMAS F. GIOCONDA
Brigadier General, USAF
Acting Deputy Administrator
for Defense Programs

cc:

Mark Whitaker, S-3.1
John C. Browne, LANL