

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

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September 9, 2005

The Honorable Samuel W. Bodman
Secretary of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-1000

Dear Secretary Bodman:

The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) has evaluated the Department of Energy's (DOE) request of August 8, 2005, to close Recommendation 99-1, *Safe Storage of Fissionable Material Called "Pits,"* which was issued to DOE on August 11, 1999. The Board agrees that the corrective actions implemented by DOE to address the issues raised in Recommendation 99-1 have resulted in a significant improvement to DOE's ability to store strategic stockpile and surplus pits safely at the Pantex Plant.

During the last few years, the rate of repackaging of Pantex pits has met or exceeded the target repackaging rate of 200 pits per month. More than 97 percent of the pits identified in DOE's Implementation Plan for Recommendation 99-1 have been repackaged, and repackaging of the remaining pits is scheduled to be complete by the end of fiscal year 2005. The Board applauds DOE's efforts in maintaining consistent priority and funding to complete the pit repackaging project. The Board also commends BWXT-Pantex for its efforts in managing and executing a sound program for pit surveillance, repackaging, and storage.

One of the corrective actions implemented as a result of Recommendation 99-1 was the development of a Pantex Pit Management Plan (PMP) and a surveillance program for the sealed insert containers for the duration of pit storage at Pantex. The Board encourages DOE to capture the milestones achieved in the preceding year and goals for the upcoming year in the annual updates to the PMP. The Board is also aware of plans to relocate subsequent repackaging operations to another facility next year. The completion of this relocation effort is key to ensuring that future repackaging needs are met in a timely manner.

To ensure that the repackaging of pits into sealed insert containers continues, the Board strongly urges that requirements be established to limit the duration for which pits derived from future disassembly or dismantlement activities may remain in non-sealed insert containers before being repackaged. These requirements should preclude the accumulation of a backlog of pits requiring repackaging in sealed insert containers and ensure the continuation of safe storage of all pits at Pantex.

The Board accepts DOE's final report on Recommendation 99-1 and agrees to close the Recommendation. Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 2286b(d), the Board requests an annual briefing coincident with the annual update to the PMP. This annual briefing should cover the updates to the PMP; the first annual briefing should also address the requirements established to limit the duration for which future pits may remain in non-sealed insert containers and a status of efforts to relocate and restart repackaging operations. Given the significance of pit storage and handling to safety and national security, the Board will continue to monitor the pit packaging program at Pantex.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. J. Eggenberger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "A." and the last name "Eggenberger" clearly visible.

A. J. Eggenberger
Chairman

c: Mr. Daniel E. Glenn
Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.
The Honorable Linton Brooks