



Department of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

December 17, 1998

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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:

Your November 17, 1998, correspondence requested plans and a resource loaded schedule for DOE review and approval activities related to the performance of certain projects as well as qualifications, and affiliations of those individuals assigned to these review activities. DOE continues to work with project management at the Los Alamos National Laboratory as they finalize the details necessary to properly assign special resources for which many programs compete. The Laboratory goal is to complete the Operational Readiness Review in a time consistent with current plans for the execution of the next proposed experiment. A schedule of the DOE associated activities and resources will be provided following the completion of the Laboratory's resource assessment. We will continue to coordinate and integrate our activities with the Laboratory to assure that sufficient time and talent is available to the DOE for the review of pertinent safety issues prior to the commencement of Laboratory activities leading to test execution.

Defense Programs has defined the activities that must be completed in order to provide adequate assurance that work supporting the program will be performed safely. These activities are sequentially outlined in the enclosure to this letter. Also enclosed are the names, qualifications and affiliations of the DOE and outside experts currently involved or scheduled to be involved in the necessary safety reviews. Should conflicts arise due to scheduling changes, additional DOE or outside experts will be called upon to provide the appropriate assistance in reviewing these safety issues.

Consistent with the principles and application of Integrated Safety Management, the LANL team responsible for conducting these experiments is addressing safety aspects as a part of their overall planning for the experiment. Similarly, DOE Defense Programs (DP), Albuquerque Operations Office, and Los Alamos Area Office staffs are actively involved with the development of the programmatic and safety aspects of this project to assure that our activities are integrated. The final schedule of activities will fully cover all necessary programmatic and safety steps.

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Finally, the attachment to your letter, involving issues raised at a meeting held at LANL on July 21-22, 1998, states that there is a concern that LANL may accelerate schedules to perform certain tests involving more challenging charge loadings, potentially resulting in inadequate lead time to perform and understand results of analyses of confinement vessel integrity and response. Let me assure you that this is not the case. The vessel performance assurance infrastructure has been established and will be adhered to as preparations are made to perform future tests, which may exceed the currently established envelope. We are gratified to learn that you believe the upcoming proposed experiment to be within the bounds of currently analyzed capabilities of the test confinement vessels. We will keep your staff apprised of schedule changes and other issues affecting the timing or performance of specific experiments.

We would like to provide you with a followup briefing on this topic at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions or comments involving the enclosed report, please contact Dr. Gil Weigand, Deputy Assistant Secretary or have your staff contact Tim Beville at (301) 903-8251.

Sincerely,


Victor H. Reis
Assistant Secretary
for Defense Programs

Enclosure

cc w/enclosure:
M. Whitaker, S-3.1

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