

John T. Conway, Chairman
A.J. Eggenberger, Vice Chairman
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DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

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November 15, 2002

The Honorable Jessie Hill Roberson
Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-0113


Dear Ms. Roberson:

In a letter dated March 22, 2002, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) expressed concern about the potential for accelerated corrosion in the vapor space of double-shell high-level waste tanks. The Board was pleased that the Department of Energy (DOE) held a vapor-space corrosion workshop on March 26–27, 2002, and encouraged DOE to maintain a high priority for this important issue. The Board also requested to be briefed on the findings of this workshop. The Board is concerned that six months have passed since the workshop and the Board has not been briefed on the findings. The Board also notes that the workshop was sponsored by the now-defunct Tanks Focus Area, and funding is uncertain for implementation of workshop findings or continued vapor-space corrosion studies.

The hazard of high-level waste makes it imperative that the integrity of the double-shell tanks be protected throughout their service lives. Understanding vapor-space corrosion phenomena and inspecting the tanks in a timely manner to detect the onset of unexpected corrosion are important features in maintaining leak-free tanks.

The Board requests that DOE provide a briefing on the vapor-space corrosion program including the schedule for actions and funding support within 30 days of receipt of this letter.

Sincerely,


John T. Conway
Chairman

c: Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.
Mr. Jeffrey M. Allison