

John T. Conway, Chairman
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 John W. Crawford, Jr.
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DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

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December 5, 1995



The Honorable Tara J. O'Toole
 Assistant Secretary for Environment,
 Safety and Health
 Department of Energy
 Washington, D.C. 20585-0119

The Honorable Thomas P. Grumbly
 Assistant Secretary for Environmental
 Management
 Department of Energy
 Washington, D.C. 20585-0113

Dear Dr. O'Toole and Mr. Grumbly:

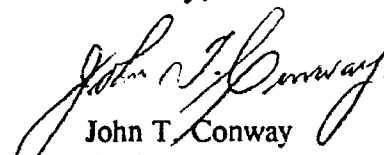
Several Board Members were briefed recently at the Hanford Site regarding operations of the Tank Farms. The issue raised by the Board's staff and pursued by the Board was the process used by the Department of Energy (DOE) line management for review and approval of changes in established safety limits. The specific situation that triggered this inquiry involved changes in criticality limits for operation of the tank farms initiated by the contractor without apparent prior review and approval by DOE.

The results of the DOE/RL review of the criticality change issue is reported in DOE/RL Assessment Report 95-55, *Control of Tank Farms Criticality Authorization Basis* issued November 1995.

The Board commends those who investigated and reported on this matter. They identified that the lack of a site-wide process for managing the authorization basis as a root cause for the problem. They also observed that ". . . if this cause is not corrected soon, the problem can be expected to recur elsewhere." The Board assumes that DOE program management will move promptly with the necessary corrective actions.

This incident and the conclusions drawn from its investigation are indicative of the problem that the Board identified in its Recommendation 95-2. The Board commends DOE/RL Report 95-55 to you and the team you have assembled for review of Recommendation 95-2 for consideration in your deliberations on the response to our recommendation.

Sincerely,


 John T. Conway
 Chairman

c: Mr. John Wagoner
 Mr. Mark Whitaker

Enclosure

Performance Assessment Division
U.S. Department of Energy, Richland Operations Office

Assessment Report
AS 95-55

Control of Tank Farms Criticality Authorization Basis

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October 4 - November 2, 1995
