



**The Secretary of Energy**  
Washington, DC 20585

March 6, 2003

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

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your letter in which you raised two issues related to the Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant (WTP) at the Hanford Site in Washington State.

The first is a concern that the Department of Energy (DOE) and Bechtel National, Incorporated (BNI) have not instituted a formal strategy for maintaining design margins as a function of design uncertainties. The second concern is about Federal oversight of the project. This response and the enclosed report discuss actions that DOE has taken to address these concerns.

For a project of this size and complexity, it is important to carefully maintain and manage design margin. Design margin is managed by BNI, and assessed by DOE, as a part of an integrated set of requirements to address design uncertainty. Although requirements had not been formally documented in a single readily available format, they have been articulated in the enclosure to this letter. These requirements are being formalized and will be available for review by March 31, 2003.

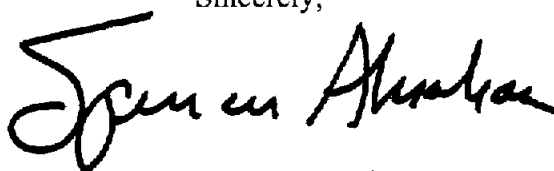
Federal oversight is an important component of this project that needs improvement. The Office of River Protection (ORP) has been increasing its oversight activities of the detailed design and construction of the WTP. An integrated Oversight Schedule has been developed. The enclosure to this letter describes the combined elements of ORP's oversight of the WTP, actions taken and actions planned to improve existing day-to-day oversight, actions being taken to provide formal guidance for additional design reviews as the WTP design is evolving, as well as some of the important results of design reviews performed last year.



The Department's approach for systematic oversight of the WTP provides confidence in the BNI design process and confirmation that the BNI design meets functional, design, and operability requirements. By adopting these approaches, I believe that potential problems that may challenge or affect the functionality of safety significant systems or structures will be identified before they manifest themselves as issues. Your comments are helpful to me in focusing and strengthening our oversight activities for WTP, and I will keep you apprised of our progress.

If you have any further questions, please contact me or Ms. Jessie Hill Roberson, Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management, at (202) 586-7709.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Spencer Abraham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Spencer Abraham

Enclosure