



96-0002183

Department of Energy
Germantown, MD 20874-1290

May 23, 1996

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DNF SAFETY BOARD

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

Dear Mr. Conway:

I am responding to your April 19, 1996, letter to Dr. Reis regarding your staff's observations about the Nuclear Explosive Safety Study (NESS) revalidation process. The purpose of a revalidation is to determine whether the process or the nuclear explosive device has changed to the extent that the operations fall outside the scope of the original NESS. If operations are considered by the NESS Group (NESSG) (the safety experts) to be beyond the scope of the original NESS, then they will recommend that a new NESS be performed. Stated another way, there must be unanimous agreement by all NESSG members that the current NESS remains valid.

NESS Revalidation is new, and our requirements are evolving as we gain experience. The lessons learned from the first two revalidations have led us to improve and clarify our requirements for the conduct of a revalidation. These are now contained in the NESS Process Standard DOE-YYYY-95. Key examples of improvements are that we now specifically require the NESSG to evaluate safety enhancements and provide a written rationale and justification for the group's conclusions.

The safety of the nuclear explosive operation is assured by the original NESS, the fact that all changes since the original NESS are reviewed for possible adverse impact on nuclear explosive safety, and by the formal review conducted by the NESSG in the revalidation process. As with any safety process, the results of NESS revalidations depend on the qualifications, integrity, and independent technical judgment of the individual NESSG members. I have confidence that our field and Headquarters people will do the right thing for safety. My pledge to you is that we will continue to be directly involved in the NESS revalidation process and continue to make improvements as they may be needed to continue to provide safety assurance.

In conclusion, I believe that the current NESS revalidation process is viable and I expect to continue to refine and improve the process. My staff will continue to work with your staff as this happens.



If you have any questions, please call me or have your staff contact Ed Cassidy of my staff at 301-903-7559.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Seitz', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Thomas P. Seitz
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Military Application and
Stockpile Management
Defense Programs

cc:

M. Whitaker, S-3.1
V. Stello, DP-3
B. Twining, AL
T. Vaeth, NV
J. Turner, OAK