

A.J. Eggenberger, Chairman
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DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

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December 8, 2008



The Honorable Thomas P. D'Agostino
Administrator
National Nuclear Security Administration
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-0701

Dear Mr. D'Agostino:

In a letter to the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) dated May 31, 2005, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) raised a number of issues regarding weaknesses in the fire protection program at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). Paramount among these issues was the lack of a formal plan to address the baseline needs assessment for fire and emergency services conducted in 2004 and the lack of a long-term contract for these services with Los Alamos County. The Board acknowledges NNSA's recent completion of a cooperative agreement for fire and emergency services with Los Alamos County. The Board remains concerned regarding the outlook for aligning those services with the unique capabilities required to meet the fire protection needs of LANL. The enclosed report, prepared by the Board's staff, indicates that recommendations resulting from prior baseline needs assessments have not been addressed despite extensive analysis and plans.

The report further indicates that there are weaknesses in the current capability to respond to a fire or other emergency event in the unique hazard environments associated with defense nuclear facilities at LANL. This situation is a direct result of the failure to implement long-standing recommendations made in the 1995 and 2004 Baseline Needs Assessments, and is further evidenced by observations made and issues identified by Los Alamos National Security, LLC during recent emergency exercises. The enclosed report also finds that staffing shortages may be hindering needed improvements to the laboratory's fire protection program.

The Board understands that an updated baseline needs assessment is being prepared and is expected to be completed in December 2008. Timely completion of a comprehensive assessment and aggressive resolution of the associated recommendations should help improve the capabilities to respond to an emergency at LANL. The Board believes that NNSA must do a better job of implementing recommendations resulting from their baseline needs assessment than previously done in order to provide an adequate level of fire protection.

Therefore, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 2286b(d), the Board requests a report within 90 days after receipt of this letter that provides the following information:

- The prudent immediate measures to be taken to begin improving the identified weaknesses in fire and emergency response capabilities prior to fully implementing the updated baseline needs assessment;
- A summary of the results of the latest 2008 Baseline Needs Assessment (being prepared) focusing on the specific capabilities (in terms of equipment, personnel, training, and planning) necessary to provide comprehensive, effective fire and emergency response for the defense nuclear facilities at LANL and how the recently completed cooperative agreement for fire and emergency response will address these capabilities; and
- The strategy and schedule for achieving the necessary fire and emergency response capabilities.

Subsequently the Board also requests a report within 180 days of receipt of this letter that details plans, schedules, funding sources, and progress for fully implementing the updated Baseline Needs Assessment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. J. Eggenberger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A." and a long, sweeping underline.

A. J. Eggenberger
Chairman

Enclosure

c: Mr. Donald L. Winchell, Jr.
Mr. Mark B. Whitaker, Jr.