



The Secretary of Energy
Washington, DC 20585

November 18, 2004

The Honorable Bill Richardson
Governor of New Mexico
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

Dear Governor Richardson:

Thank you for your September 8, 2004, letter regarding Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) Technical Area (TA)-18. You requested that the Department of Energy halt criticality experiments until all safety issues are resolved and independently verified by the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board).

I share your concerns regarding the importance of safe and secure nuclear operations at LANL. As you are aware, risk assessment is an important part of the Department's evaluation of proposed activities at our sites, and based on evaluation results from this past spring, the Department does not intend to conduct the experiment referenced in your letter.

In addition, since the Board's May 21, 2004, letter on this subject to Linton F. Brooks, Administrator, National Nuclear Security Administration, we have modified TA-18 operational plans at the site. In light of our new schedule, the number of other criticality experiments planned for fiscal year 2005 is significantly reduced, and these experiments are scheduled to be completed by summer 2005. Although we have no current plans for additional experiments, a solution critical assembly will be available to support any essential training activities that may be required before criticality experiment operations are established in Nevada as part of the TA-18 relocation initiative.

If you have further questions, please contact me or Mr. Rick A. Dearborn, Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs, at (202) 586-5450.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Spencer Abraham".

Spencer Abraham

cc: Mr. P. Nanos, Director, LANL



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