

Rocky Flats Citizens Advisory Board Recommendation 98-17

to the U.S. Department of Energy

Regarding Materials Characterization and Storage Concerns

Approved August 6, 1998

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Ms. Jessie Roberson
Manager, DOE-RFFO
P.O. Box 928
Golden, CO 80402-0928

Dear Jessie:

At its July meeting, the Plutonium Issues Focus Group of the Rocky Flats Citizens Advisory Board reviewed two recent occurrence reports outlined in the Operating Experience Weekly Summary 98-20, for the week of May 15-21, 1998, that is produced by the DOE Office of Nuclear and Facility Safety. One occurrence resulted in a violation of nuclear material safety limits, while the other involved the improper storage of scrub alloy material. In reviewing these occurrences, the Focus Group noted several concerns as outlined below. RFCAB asks that you review these occurrences and our concerns, and that you provide a response to them. A copy of the occurrence report is attached.

The description of the nuclear safety limit violations notes that several Rocky Flats Site Weekly Summaries, specifically 98-19, 97-46 and 96-73, report criticality safety infractions. The DOE report further states that there is a need for personnel to clearly understand criticality safety issues and that it is important to write clear and accurate procedures to eliminate areas of confusion. RFCAB requests that DOE provide the Board information on the corrective actions that have been taken in addressing these two concerns.

A most disturbing quotation found in the nuclear safety limit violation report is that "Operations personnel and managers expressed more concern over the loss of production time rather than the safety significance of this event." Both Rocky Flats Field Office Personnel and the Integrating Contractor Kaiser-Hill have indicated to RFCAB and the public that "Safety First" is the number one priority during cleanup.

RFCAB has sent numerous letters to DOE expressing concerns on the issues of safety of the workers and members of this community. We are requesting the RFFO provide written information to us on steps that have been taken since Weekly Summary 98-20 was published to instill in all workers and management at Rocky Flats that safety must come first and meeting production or closure milestones second.

The report discussion on improper storage of scrub alloy material indicates that problems continue to occur at Rocky Flats in areas where the site has determined that none exist or have been corrected. In 1994, both the DOE Office of Environment, Safety and Health and the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board outlined problems associated with the storage of nuclear material at the site. Although significant progress has been made in correcting these problems, materials stored in unsafe configurations continue to appear. Please provide RFCAB with information on the following:

1. When will the site complete the inventory and characterization of every container of nuclear material to certify that what is assumed in the container is indeed within it?
2. In 1996, a plan was developed by building managers to sample and analyze storage containers to ensure they were properly classified. According to the Weekly Summary report, investigators determined that the building managers did not complete implementation of the plan. RFCAB would like to know what actions have been taken to ensure that the building managers implement these plans.

In closing, RFCAB wishes to assure you that it supports the overall goal of early closure of the site in order to reduce the threat Rocky Flats poses to this community. However, this goal must not sacrifice safety. Reducing the overall threat from Rocky Flats must not itself lead to increased short term risks that jeopardize the health and safety of the workers and members of the community.

We thank you in advance for your cooperation in providing us additional information on these matters. RFCAB asks that you understand our sense of urgency and asks for your soonest response.

Sincerely,

Tom Marshall
Chair

cc: (w/ enclosure)

Congressman David Skaggs
Congressman Dan Schaefer
Senator Wayne Allard
Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell

The Rocky Flats Citizens Advisory Board is a community advisory group that reviews and provides recommendations on cleanup plans for Rocky Flats, a former nuclear weapons plant outside of Denver, Colorado.

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