Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board

June 3, 2026

Establishment of the DNFSB

- US nuclear weapons are produced in the Department of Energy's (DOE) defense nuclear facilities for the Department of Defense. Defense nuclear facilities also stabilize (i.e., clean up) radioactive wastes from previous nuclear weapons manufacturing.

- In the late 1980's, due to a variety of issues and public concerns, Congress questioned DOE's ability to manage the complex safely and wanted a body of experts to report unbiased and timely information on the state of the DOE defense nuclear complex.
  - Previously, there was no separation of operation and safety oversight (e.g., unlike in the civil nuclear industry).
  - Spearheaded by Senator John Glenn.

- Congress established the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board or DNFSB) and charged it with identifying potential issues of adequate protection at defense nuclear facilities, advising the Secretary of Energy of those issues, and informing the public.

- The Board provides oversight of DOE and is independent in the execution of its mission.
  - Part of the Executive Branch—not part of DOE.
  - Not a regulator like the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Plutonium oxide produced at the Plutonium Facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL).

Excavation of Corrugated Metal Pipes from Area G at LANL.

DNFSB's Tools for Nuclear Safety Oversight

Recommendations: Require DOE either to:

(a) fix issues that challenge the adequate protection of the health and safety of the public and workers at defense nuclear facilities, or
(b) inform Congress why it rejected the Board's Recommendation.

Reporting Requirements: DOE must provide its analyses or actions it plans to take (or has taken) to remediate safety issues at defense nuclear facilities.

Advice Letters and Reports: Advise DOE on questionable practices, potential root causes, or problems impacting multiple defense nuclear facilities, as well as highlight observed best practices.

Staff-To-Staff Discussions: Promote staff-to-staff engagement to fix identified nuclear safety issues as early as possible. DOE and its contractors often appreciate DNFSB staff feedback and the opportunity to address issues at the lowest level.

DNFSB Overview

"The mission of the Board shall be to provide independent analysis, advice, and recommendations to the Secretary of Energy to inform the Secretary, in the role of the Secretary as operator and regulator of the defense nuclear facilities of the Department of Energy, in providing adequate protection of public health and safety at such defense nuclear facilities, including with respect to the health and safety of employees and contractors at such facilities." - Atomic Energy Act of 1954, as amended

Current Board Members

Dr. Patricia L. Lee
Member

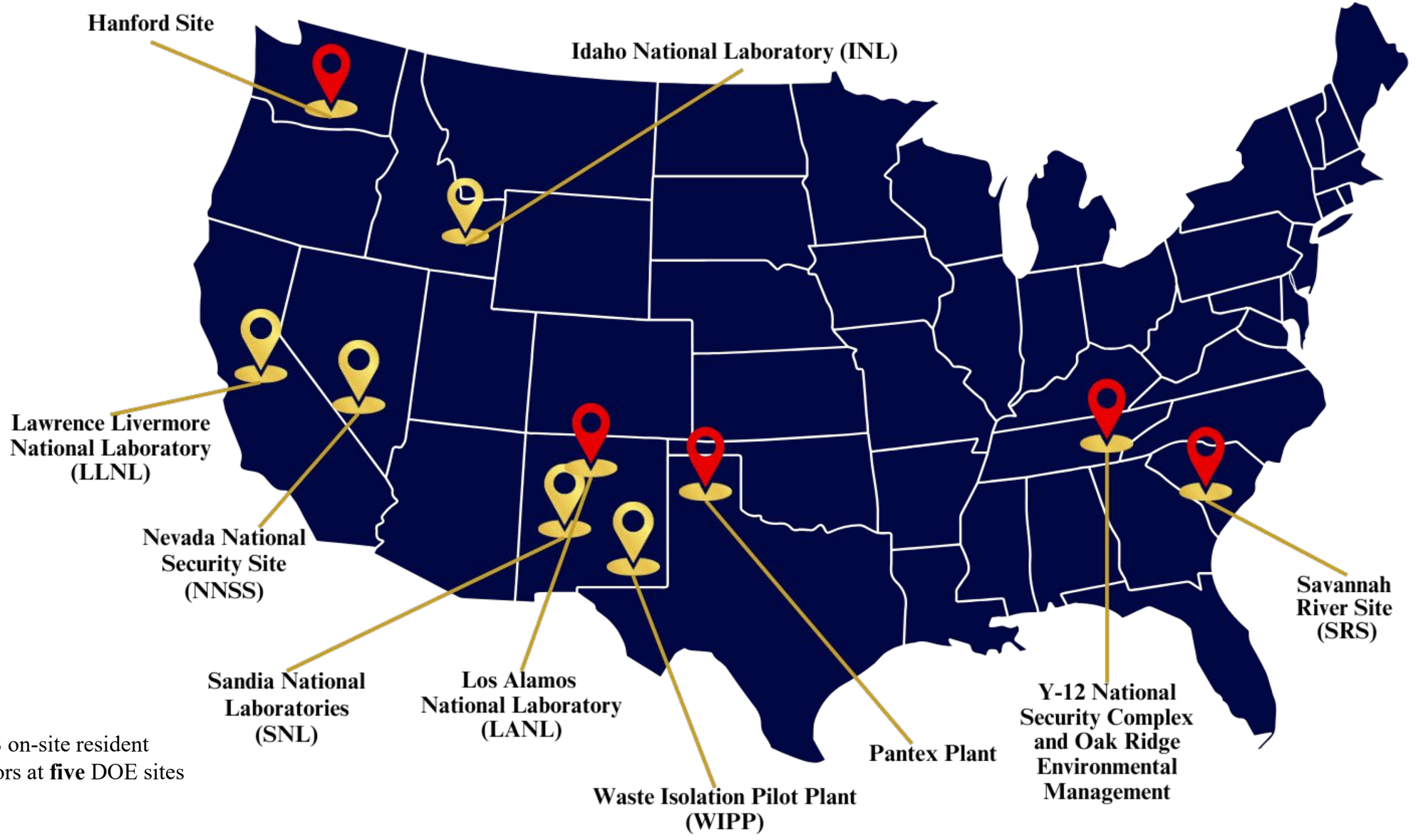
4 Vacancies

- By statute, Board members are required to be "respected experts in the field of nuclear safety with a demonstrated competence and knowledge relevant to the independent investigative and oversight functions of the Board."
- On October 18, 2025, Vice Chair Summers' term expired.
- For the first time in its 36-year history, the Board has one member and no Chair or Vice-Chair.
- However, certain authorities have been delegated to the longest serving remaining Board member.
- DNFSB will continue operating and focusing on protecting public and worker health and safety at DOE's defense nuclear facilities.

DNFSB Overview

- DNFSB's Office of the Technical Director has a highly-trained technical staff.
  - Nearly all have master's degrees, and many have doctoral degrees in fields like nuclear engineering, chemical engineering, mechanical engineering, geophysics/earth sciences, and fire protection engineering.
  - The technical staff have a wide variety of experience and backgrounds relevant to the mission such as working for DOE facilities and contractors, the civilian nuclear industry, state and federal regulatory organizations, and even international nuclear organizations.
- DNFSB staffing is capped statutorily at 130 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) of which, approximately 80 FTE are allotted to the Office of the Technical Director.
- Office of the Technical Director staffing is split between HQ based staff located in Washington D.C., and staff assigned to a variety of defense nuclear facilities.
- Board Statutory Authorities that are informed by technical staff efforts include:
  - Issue Formal Recommendations to the Secretary of Energy about adequate protection of public health and safety.
  - Levy reporting requirements on the Secretary of Energy.
  - Conduct open or closed hearing and meetings, including the power to subpoena witnesses, if needed.
  - Conduct investigations and special studies.

DOE Sites with Defense Nuclear Facilities



= DNFSB on-site resident inspectors at **five** DOE sites

Los Alamos Resident Inspectors

David Gutowski
Chemical and
Nuclear Engineer

Eric Freeman
Nuclear Engineer and
Health Physicist

Jason Kemp
Fire Protection Engineer

Resident Inspectors are the Board's eyes and ears at DOE's defense nuclear facilities. Everyday, they can observe high-hazard nuclear work, monitor nuclear facility conditions, hear concerns from the workforce, and represent DNFSB with site DOE and contractor leadership. They play an invaluable role in DNFSB's nuclear safety oversight.

Los Alamos Resident Inspectors

- Resident Inspectors are stationed at the LANL to carry out the functions of the DNFSB.
  - Live in the nearby communities.
  - Have access to facilities and information in a manner consistent with National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) and DOE's Office of Environmental Management (DOE-EM) staff.

- Resident Inspectors at LANL engage in a wide variety of activities such as:
  - Observing work at defense nuclear facilities.
  - Conducting facility walkdowns.
  - Reviewing DOE and contractor procedures and work documents.
  - Shadowing DOE and contractor assessments to determine effectiveness.
  - Meeting with contractor management and workers.
  - Attending fact finding meetings to assess efficacy.
  - Supporting onsite reviews by DNFSB's expert teams.
  - Writing weekly reports appropriate for public consumption.
  - Helping address safety allegations.

- Resident Inspectors at LANL interface with a wide range of stakeholders such as DOE officials (NNSA and DOE-EM), contractor staff (Triad, N3B, APTIM), members of the public, other federal personnel, and state and local government officials.

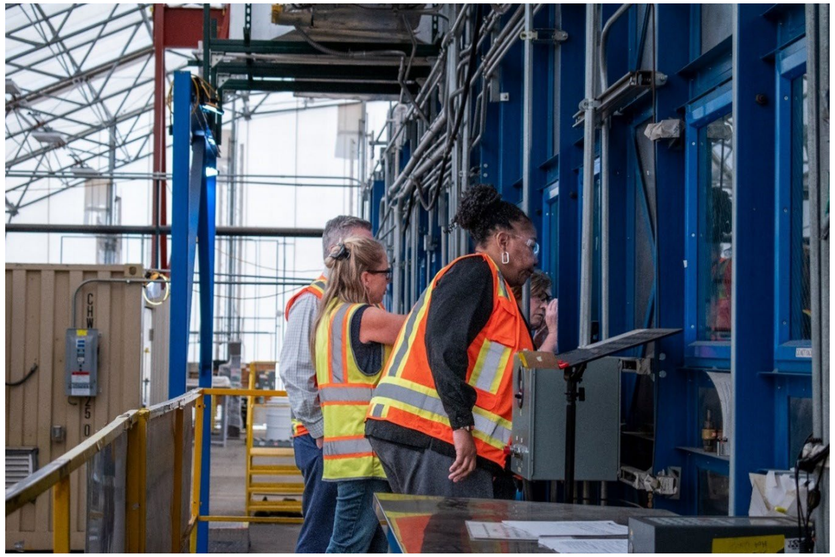
DNFSB Activities Related to LANL

Recent Board Letters and Activities Focused on LANL:

- October 10, 2025: LANL Plutonium Facility (PF-4) safety basis.
- July 25, 2025: LANL Area G safety basis and path forward.
- June 12, 2025: LANL PF-4 decontamination and decommissioning (D&D) work planning and control.
- March 17, 2025: Board review of three DOE nuclear criticality safety programs (including LANL).
- July 29-31, 2025: Board visit to LANL.

Current Areas of Focus/Review for DNFSB:

- Plutonium Facility resources and work control.
- Shift to 24/7 operations and federal oversight.
- Effectiveness of corrective actions.
- Facility aging and maintenance.
- Fire protection and fire hazard evaluations.
- Area G safety basis and ongoing work.



Board Member visits to PF-4 and Area G

Report a Safety Concern

https://www.dnfsb.gov/safety-allegations

DNFSB will evaluate all safety concerns within its jurisdiction, which generally encompasses radiological hazards at DOE defense nuclear facilities and non-radiological hazards with a potential to cause radiological hazards at such facilities. The safety concerns DNFSB evaluates include those involving design, construction, operation, maintenance, radiation protection, defense-in-depth, emergency preparedness, and a work environment's receptivity to workers raising safety concerns. The Board may address such safety concerns by providing timely safety analysis, advice, and recommendations to the Secretary of Energy.

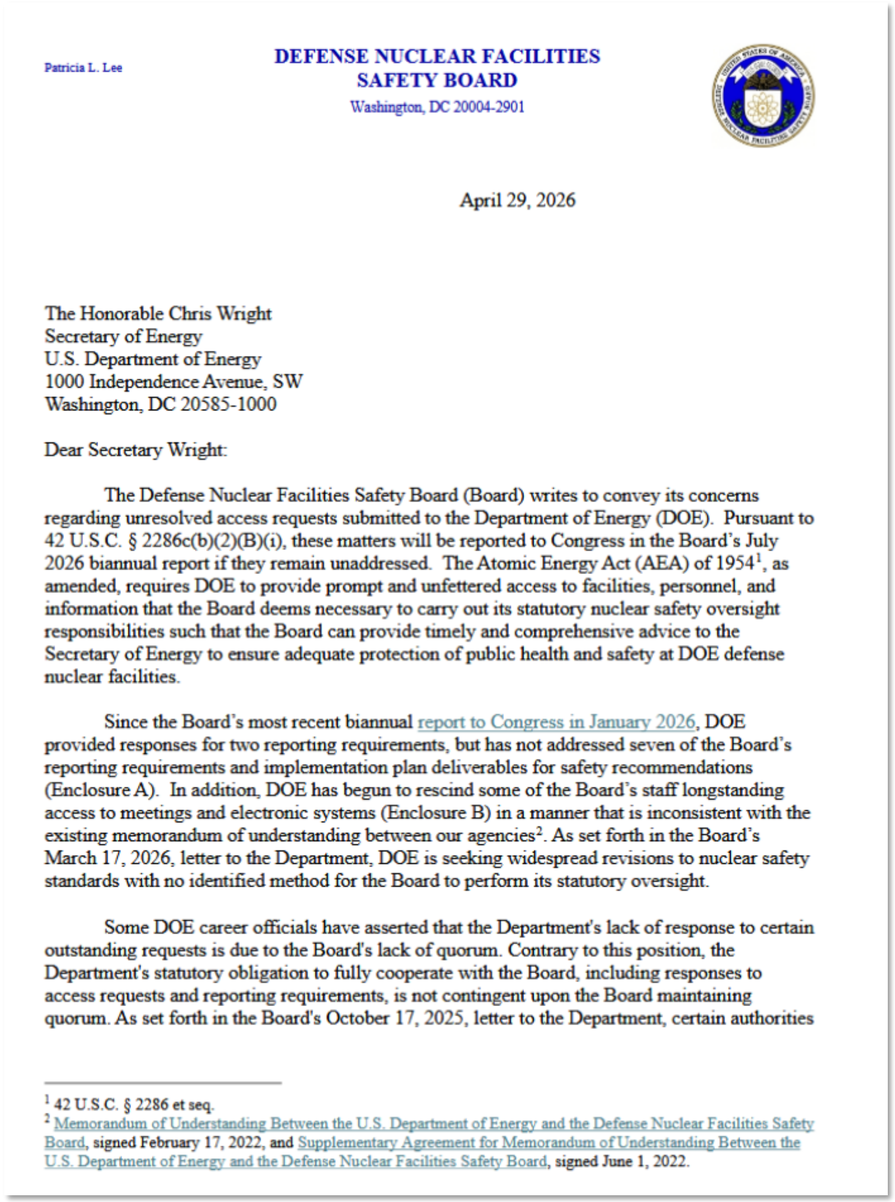
Discussion

www.dnfsb.gov

DNFSB recommendations, letters, reports, site weekly reports, impacts, and more.

Backup Slides

Interface between DNFSB and DOE



Patricia L. Lee

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD
Washington, DC 20004-2901

April 29, 2026

The Honorable Chris Wright
Secretary of Energy
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-1000

Dear Secretary Wright:

The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) writes to convey its concerns regarding unresolved access requests submitted to the Department of Energy (DOE). Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 2286c(b)(2)(B)(i), these matters will be reported to Congress in the Board's July 2026 biannual report if they remain unaddressed. The Atomic Energy Act (AEA) of 1954[1], as amended, requires DOE to provide prompt and unfettered access to facilities, personnel, and information that the Board deems necessary to carry out its statutory nuclear safety oversight responsibilities such that the Board can provide timely and comprehensive advice to the Secretary of Energy to ensure adequate protection of public health and safety at DOE defense nuclear facilities.

Since the Board's most recent biannual report to Congress in January 2026, DOE provided responses for two reporting requirements, but has not addressed seven of the Board's reporting requirements and implementation plan deliverables for safety recommendations (Enclosure A). In addition, DOE has begun to rescind some of the Board's staff longstanding access to meetings and electronic systems (Enclosure B) in a manner that is inconsistent with the existing memorandum of understanding between our agencies[2]. As set forth in the Board's March 17, 2026, letter to the Department, DOE is seeking widespread revisions to nuclear safety standards with no identified method for the Board to perform its statutory oversight.

Some DOE career officials have asserted that the Department's lack of response to certain outstanding requests is due to the Board's lack of quorum. Contrary to this position, the Department's statutory obligation to fully cooperate with the Board, including responses to access requests and reporting requirements, is not contingent upon the Board maintaining quorum. As set forth in the Board's October 17, 2025, letter to the Department, certain authorities

[1] 42 U.S.C. § 2286 et seq.
[2] Memorandum of Understanding Between the U.S. Department of Energy and the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, signed February 17, 2022, and Supplementary Agreement for Memorandum of Understanding Between the U.S. Department of Energy and the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, signed June 1, 2022.

Recent Board letters to DOE:

- April 29, 2026: Concerns with DNFSB access requests.
  - Reiterates limited progress since the January 2026 Report to Congress on Access Denials.
  - Lists 12 outstanding access requests from the DNFSB staff.
  - Highlights legal concerns with a DOE memorandum directing changes to the interface with the DNFSB dated March 10, 2026.

- March 17, 2026: Annual directives letter.
  - Communicates results of directives reviews from FY 2025.
  - Notes DOE initiated a series of revisions to important regulations and directives that impact nuclear safety.
  - Advises DOE to continue its Review and Comment process (or implement an alternative process) to engage DOE experts and the DNFSB on these revisions.
  - Requests DOE's desired method to furnish timely proposed revisions to DOE Standards of Interest to the DNFSB.