



Media Contacts

Dennis Hurtt
U.S. DOE Carlsbad Area Office
(505) 234-7327

Donavan Mager
Westinghouse
Waste Isolation Division
(505) 234-7518

1-800-493-9768
<http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>

For Immediate Release
**DOE and Westinghouse to Hold Public Meetings
On Proposed Modifications to WIPP Hazardous Waste Permit**

CARLSBAD, N.M., April 7, 2000 – The public is invited to comment on proposed modifications to the hazardous waste facility permit for the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP).

On April 5, DOE and the Westinghouse Waste Isolation Division submitted three proposed permit modifications to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED). The modifications do not concern issues raised in the DOE's appeal of some provisions of the permit. The submittals start a formal review process that includes a 60-day public comment period and two separate public meetings. Only written comments will be accepted by NMED.

All written comments should be sent to Mr. Steve Zappe, New Mexico Environment Department, 2044A Galisteo Street, Santa Fe, NM 87505. Zappe is also accepting comments by e-mail at steve_zappe@nmenv.state.nm.us. Individuals attending the public meetings will be provided stamped envelopes addressed to NMED for use in submitting comments. Meetings are scheduled for May 16 in Carlsbad and May 18 in Santa Fe. The comment period ends June 11.

The Carlsbad meeting will consist of two sessions — from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. and from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. — at the Skeen-Whitlock Building, 4021 National Parks Highway. The Santa Fe meeting will also consist of two sessions — from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. and from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. — at the Hilton of Santa Fe, 100 Sandoval Street.

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WIPP's hazardous waste facility permit, issued last October by NMED, went into effect on November 26, 1999. The permit governs the disposal and handling of the "mixed" transuranic radioactive waste. Mixed waste consists of radioactive waste combined with hazardous constituents such as cleaning solvents and toxic metals such as lead. Most of the waste destined for disposal at WIPP is mixed.

DOE and Westinghouse have requested that NMED modify two requirements of the hazardous waste facility permit that govern waste characterization activities. The third modification proposal is a request to revise the acceptance criteria for two types of hazardous waste.

Characterization consists of activities that provide information about the physical and chemical properties of the waste. WIPP will only accept waste that meets specific criteria describing the chemical and physical makeup of the waste.

The proposed modifications are consistent with industry standards for handling hazardous materials and do not compromise the safety of the facility, the public, or its employees. Explanations of the requested modifications are as follows:

- The permit requires DOE to sample the headspace gas in all of the waste containers prior to their disposal at WIPP. Headspace gases are those gases that accumulate in the top of a waste container as the material inside decays. The sampling information is used to determine the quantity of volatile organic compounds (VOC) that might be released from the containers.

Over the 35-year life of the project, WIPP will receive hundreds of thousands of waste containers.

The permit requires that all containers in a waste stream be sampled for headspace gas. However, some waste streams do not contain VOCs and, therefore, sampling all containers should not be necessary. DOE proposes that

NMED reduce the number of containers required to be sampled for headspace gas under such conditions. The reduced number would be selected statistically to be representative of the waste stream. This proposal is described in two modification requests. The two conditions under which DOE would be allowed to reduce headspace gas sampling would be:

- 1) If the waste generator knows, based on information about the waste generating process, the waste does not contain VOC-related hazardous wastes, or
- 2) If the waste was subjected to a thermal process known to eliminate VOCs from the waste.

These modifications would allow waste to be characterized more quickly and efficiently, saving time and money. Less sampling also means less risk of injury or contamination to DOE workers doing the sampling.

- DOE also proposes that NMED revise the permit to revise criteria by which workers demonstrate the accuracy of the procedures and instruments they use to measure cresols and pyridine.

Cresols and pyridine are semi-volatile organic compounds (SVOCs). Both compounds can be hazardous to human health. For a site's waste to be acceptable for disposal at WIPP, the site must demonstrate the accuracy of its instruments and methods for measuring levels of cresols, pyridine, and other compounds. Accuracy limits are established in the permit. The permit application incorrectly used data for volatile organic compounds (VOCs) rather than using data for SVOCs to establish the accuracy limits for cresols and pyridine. Using these limits may unnecessarily exclude some wastes from disposal at WIPP.

The DOE proposes to modify the permit to use the correct accuracy limits for cresols and pyridine.

The public can obtain more information on the proposed permit modifications by logging onto the WIPP Home Page at <http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>, or by calling the WIPP Information Center, toll free, 1-800-336-WIPP (9477). Copies of the hazardous waste facility permit, including brief fact sheets on the proposed permit modifications, can be found at either location. An overview of the permit modification process is also provided.

DOE administers WIPP, while Westinghouse is the management and operating contractor for DOE at WIPP.

WIPP, a cornerstone of the DOE's cleanup effort, is designed to permanently dispose of defense-generated transuranic radioactive waste left from the research and production of nuclear weapons.

Located in southeastern New Mexico, 26 miles east of Carlsbad, project facilities include disposal rooms excavated in an ancient, stable salt formation 2,150 feet (almost one-half mile) underground. Waste disposal operations began at WIPP March 26, 1999.

Transuranic waste consists of clothing, tools, rags, debris, residues, and other disposable items contaminated with radioactive elements, mostly plutonium.

Public Meetings



On Proposed Class Two Modifications to the Hazardous Waste Permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

May 16, 2000

2:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

6:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Skeen-Whitlock Building

4021 National Parks Highway

Carlsbad, New Mexico

May 18, 2000

2:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

6:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Hilton of Santa Fe

100 Sandoval Street

Santa Fe, New Mexico

-Preregistration is not required

The purpose of these public meetings is to:

1. Provide information to the public concerning the proposed permit modifications
2. Explain the process for submitting comments
3. Provide a forum for an exchange of views with the public, the facility's owner (U.S. Department of Energy), the management and operating contractor (Westinghouse Waste Isolation Division), and the New Mexico Environment Department.

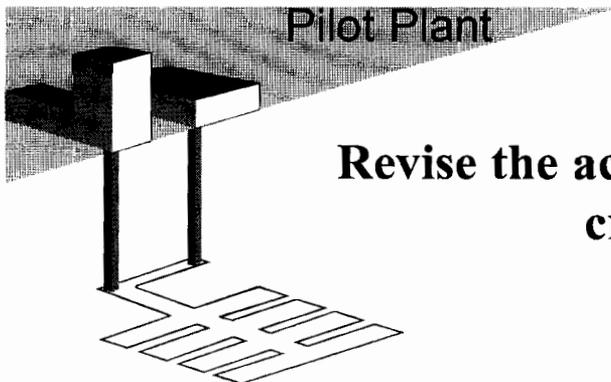
These modifications do not concern issues raised in the Department of Energy's appeal of some provisions of the permit.

To obtain information about the Class Two Permit Modifications, call the WIPP Information Center at 1-800-336-9477. The permit modifications are also available for review on the WIPP homepage <<http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>> and at the WIPP Information Center, Skeen-Whitlock Building, 4021 National Parks Highway, Carlsbad, New Mexico

**You may send
written comments to:**

Mr. Steve Zappe
New Mexico Environment Department
1190 St. Francis Drive
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502

*Comments will be accepted
until June 5, 2000*



Revise the accuracy acceptance criteria for cresols and pyridine

Summary and background

The Department of Energy (DOE) has proposed a modification to the Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) that would revise the criteria by which workers demonstrate the accuracy of the procedures and instruments they use to measure cresols and pyridine. The change, which the DOE has submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), would not adversely affect worker safety, human health, or the environment. The NMED issued the permit in October 1999. This modification does not concern issues raised in the DOE's appeal of some provisions of the permit.

What is proposed?

Cresols and pyridine are semi-volatile organic compounds (SVOCs). Both compounds can be hazardous to human health. For a site's waste to be acceptable for disposal at the WIPP, the site must demonstrate the accuracy of its instruments and methods for measuring levels of cresols, pyridine, and other compounds. Accuracy limits are established in the permit. The permit application incorrectly used data for volatile organic compounds (VOCs) rather than using data for SVOCs to establish the accuracy limits for cresols and pyridine. Using these limits may unnecessarily exclude some wastes from disposal at the WIPP.

The DOE proposes to modify the permit to use the correct accuracy limits for cresols and pyridine.

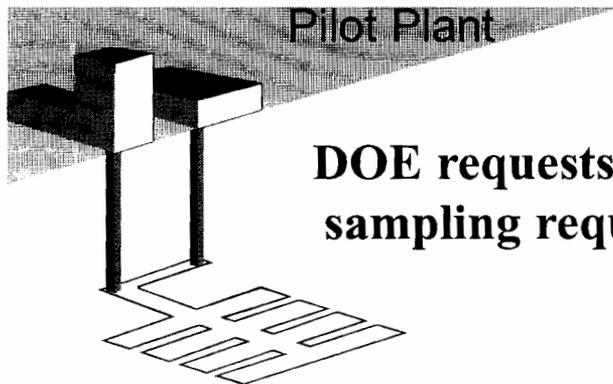
For more information

For more information about transuranic waste shipments and procedures, or to be placed on the WIPP mailing list, call the WIPP Information Center at 1-800-336-WIPP (1-800-336-9477). Or you may visit the WIPP Home Page at www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us. If you prefer, write to:

WIPP Information Center
U.S. Department of Energy
Carlsbad Area Office
P.O. Box 3090
Carlsbad, NM 88221



U.S. Department of Energy
Carlsbad Area Office
The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant



DOE requests modifications to headspace gas sampling requirements for some waste types

Summary and background

The Department of Energy (DOE) has proposed a modification to the Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) that would reduce headspace gas sampling requirements for some waste types. These types include some homogeneous solids, some soil/gravel wastes, and also waste streams generated by a thermal process. The change, which the DOE has submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), would not adversely affect worker safety, human health, or the environment. The NMED issued the permit in October 1999.

Headspace gases are those gases that accumulate in a waste container and may be indicative of hazardous waste within the container. The information obtained from headspace gas samples is used to demonstrate compliance with the hazardous waste regulations.

The hazardous waste regulations require that the operator of a hazardous waste disposal facility obtain information about the waste that the facility will manage. This information may be obtained from historical records and other information about their waste (known as acceptable knowledge) or by sampling and analyzing the waste. For waste to be disposed of at the WIPP, the DOE uses a combination of these methods, along with specialized tests developed specifically for radioactive waste.

Different sampling methods used for different contaminants

Waste streams are first characterized by acceptable knowledge to determine what hazardous contaminants are known to be present. This information is supplemented with sampling and analysis. Two types of sampling and analysis are used: *headspace gas sampling* and *homogeneous solids sampling*.

Headspace gas sampling involves taking a small amount of gas from a waste container and analyzing it for volatile organic compounds (VOCs) to ensure that the VOCs in the container do not exceed regulatory limits. Some VOCs can be hazardous to human health. The Hazardous Waste Facility Permit requires the DOE to sample the headspace gas of all waste containers before the waste is shipped to the WIPP.

Homogeneous solids sampling involves taking a core, or sample, of the waste from the container and analyzing it for certain contaminants (VOCs, semi-volatile organic compounds, PCBs, and metals). Homogeneous waste sampling is currently required for a percentage of the total containers in each homogeneous waste stream (or type of waste that was generated using the same process).

What is proposed

The proposed modifications would reduce the number of headspace gas samples required for certain homogeneous waste streams and thermally treated waste, where acceptable knowledge and homogeneous solids sampling show that little or no volatile organic compounds are present. For these waste streams, the headspace gas of a statistically selected number of containers that are representative of the waste stream would be sampled. The number would be determined using the same methods that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommends for homogeneous waste sampling.

Benefits of this proposed change

By reducing the number of drums sampled for headspace gas, the DOE would be able to characterize waste more quickly and effectively, saving time and money.

The DOE is seeking to reduce the headspace gas sampling for some wastes because under the regulations, a statistically representative sample is sufficient to quantify the waste stream. Also, the DOE generally has very good acceptable knowledge about the waste that has been verified by homogeneous waste sampling results, confirming the concentrations of volatile organic compounds.

For more information

For more information about transuranic waste shipments and procedures, or to be placed on the WIPP mailing list, call the WIPP Information Center at 1-800-336-WIPP (1-800-336-9477). Or you may visit the WIPP Home Page at www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us. If you prefer, write to:

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