

U.S. Department of Energy  
Carlsbad Area Office  
Waste Isolation Pilot Plant  
P.O. Box 3090  
Carlsbad, New Mexico 88221

# DOENews



## **Media Contacts:**

Dennis Hurtt  
U.S. Department of Energy  
Carlsbad Area Office  
(505) 234-7327

Donavan Mager  
Westinghouse Waste Isolation Division  
(505) 628-8011  
(505) 234-7518  
<http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>

### **For Immediate Release**

## **Public Invited to Comment on Additional Proposed Modifications To WIPP Hazardous Waste Permit**

**CARLSBAD, N.M., April 26, 2000** – The public is invited to comment on additional proposed modifications to the hazardous waste facility permit for the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP).

Earlier this month, DOE and the Westinghouse Waste Isolation Division requested -- through three Class 2 permit modification submittals -- that the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) change certain provisions of the state permit. On April 20, DOE and Westinghouse submitted to NMED three additional Class 2 permit modifications.

The Class 2 submittals begin a formal review process that includes a 60-day public comment period and two separate public meetings. Written comments will be accepted by NMED on the permit modification requests by DOE and Westinghouse.

All written comments regarding the proposed Class 2 modifications should be sent to 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](mailto:steve_zappe@nmenv.state.nm.us).

Individuals attending the public meetings, scheduled for May 16 in Carlsbad and May 18 in Santa Fe, will be provided envelopes addressed to NMED for use in submitting comments on all Class 2 permit modifications. The comment period ends June 25.

**-More-**

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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 chemically hazardous materials such as cleaning solvents and lead. Most of the waste destined for disposal at WIPP is mixed.

Like the permit modification requests submitted on April 5, two of the three proposed Class 2 requests submitted by DOE on April 20 ask NMED to modify specific permit provisions that guide waste characterization and certification. Characterization and certification provide physical and chemical information about the waste.

The third Class 2 modification deals with requirements for detecting certain types of radiation in the groundwater in the vicinity of WIPP.

Fact sheets explaining each of the requested modifications, and an overview describing the differences between Class 1, 2 and 3 permit modification requests, are available by logging onto the WIPP Home Page at <http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>. Additional information can be obtained by calling the WIPP Information Center, toll free, at 1-800-336-WIPP (9477). Copies of the hazardous waste facility permit are also available at either location.

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.

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# Public Meetings



## On Proposed Class 2 Modifications To the Hazardous Waste Facility 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**

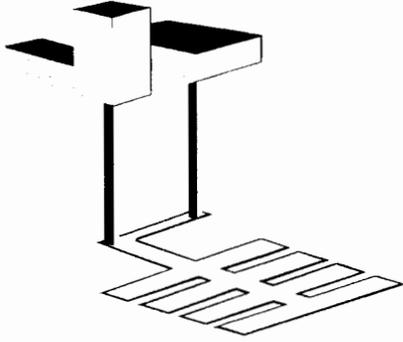
The purpose of these public meetings is to:

1. Provide information to the public concerning six proposed Class 2 modifications to the WIPP Hazardous Waste Facility Permit
  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 regulatory agency (the New Mexico Environment Department)
- ✓ The permittee's compliance history during the life of the permit being modified is available from Mr. Steve Zappe at the New Mexico Environment Department.
  - ✓ The permittees submitted three Class 2 permit modifications April 20, 2000. These permit modifications will be discussed in the same public meeting as the Class 2 modifications submitted April 5, 2000.
  - ✓ Comments on the modifications submitted April 5, 2000, will be accepted until June 11, 2000. Comments on the modifications submitted April 20, 2000, will be accepted until June 25, 2000.

To obtain information about the Class 2 Permit Modifications, call the WIPP Information Center at 1-800-336-9477. The permit modifications are also available on the WIPP homepage <<http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>> and at the WIPP Information Center, Skeen-Whitlock Building, 4021 National Parks Highway, Carlsbad, NM.

**You may also send  
written comments to:**  
Mr. Steve Zappe  
New Mexico Environment Department  
2044A Galisteo Street  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87505

# Waste Isolation Pilot Plant



## DOE proposes alternate method for groundwater testing

### ***Summary and background***

The Department of Energy (DOE) has proposed a modification to its Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) to substitute radionuclide-specific data for gross alpha and beta radiation measurements in its groundwater testing program. The change, which the DOE submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) on April 20, 2000, would not adversely affect worker safety, human health, or the environment. The NMED issued the permit in October 1999.

The purpose of the WIPP's Groundwater Detection Monitoring Program is to determine whether radioactive or hazardous constituents of the waste have been released into groundwater. The program requires the DOE to measure the gross amount of alpha and beta radiation in water samples. One problem with this requirement is that these types of radiation can also be caused by naturally occurring sources, so measuring them is not a good method of detecting a release of radiation of groundwater from materials disposed of in the WIPP. In addition, due to the high salinity of the groundwater in the area, measurement of gross alpha and beta radiation is difficult. In order to meet the analytical method requirements, samples must be excessively diluted. This results in measurements that do not provide useful information to WIPP scientists or the NMED.

### ***What is proposed***

The DOE proposes to substitute radionuclide-specific data for gross alpha and beta radiation measurements. This change would include analyzing for americium-241, plutonium-238, plutonium-239/240, uranium-234, uranium-235, uranium-238, strontium-90, potassium-40, cesium-137, and cobalt-60. These radionuclide-specific analyses are more likely to alert WIPP scientists and the NMED to the presence of any possible contamination from transuranic waste. This radionuclide-specific data would be provided to the NMED.

### ***For more information***

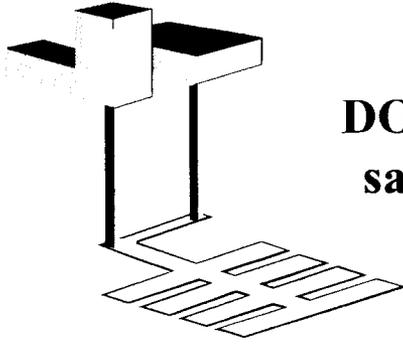
For more information about transuranic waste shipments and procedures, or to be placed on the WIPP mailing list, call the WIPP Information Center at 1-800-336-WIPP (1-800-336-9477). Or you may visit the WIPP Home Page at [www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us](http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us). If you prefer, write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

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The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

# Waste Isolation Pilot Plant



## DOE requests change to allow flexibility in sampling for volatile organic compounds

### ***Summary and background***

The Department of Energy (DOE) has proposed a modification to its Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) to allow more flexibility in how homogeneous waste is sampled. The change, which the DOE submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) on April 20, 2000, would not adversely affect worker safety, human health, or the environment. The NMED issued the permit in October 1999.

Prior to shipping waste to the WIPP, the DOE must first characterize it (identify its physical, chemical, and radiological properties), and then certify that it meets the criteria for disposal at the WIPP. Part of the characterization process for homogenous solids (waste that is similar throughout the waste container) involves analyzing a sample of the waste, which is taken from the container as a core. Under the WIPP permit, three sub-samples must be taken from the core, then combined and analyzed to determine whether the materials contain any volatile organic compounds (VOCs). By contrast, the permit requires that only one sample be taken for laboratory analysis for semi-volatile organic compounds (such as PCBs) and metals (such as lead and mercury).

### ***What is proposed***

The DOE proposes a modification that would allow sites characterizing waste for shipment to the WIPP to choose between sample collection methods approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that allow the taking of one sub-sample or three sub-samples. The DOE's proposal is consistent with EPA guidance for sample collection. Using one sub-sample would not adversely affect the representativeness of the sample.

### ***For more information***

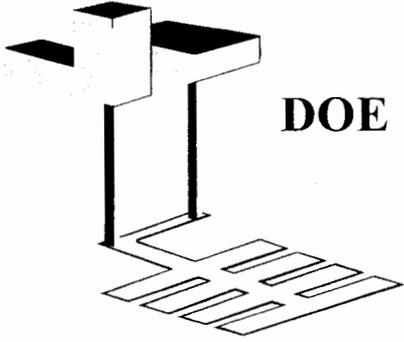
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## Waste Isolation Pilot Plant



### **DOE requests change in determining how many waste containers must be opened for visual examination**

#### ***Summary and background***

The Department of Energy (DOE) has proposed a modification to its Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) concerning the number of drums that workers must open and visually examine. The change, which the DOE submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) on April 20, 2000, would not adversely affect worker safety, human health, or the environment. The NMED issued the permit in October 1999.

All waste shipped to the WIPP must be characterized according to the permit's Waste Analysis Plan. A technique called radiography uses x-rays to look at the physical form of the waste and to identify items that are prohibited from disposal at the WIPP, such as liquids. A certain number of containers must be opened and visually examined to confirm the radiography results. A table in the permit incorporates the two factors that are used to determine how many containers must be opened for visual inspection:

- 1) The percentage of waste containers miscertified by radiography in previous years (called a miscertification rate)
- 2) The annual number of waste containers per waste stream (waste generated by the same process at the same location) undergoing characterization

#### ***What is proposed***

The DOE proposes to apply miscertification rates based on whether the waste is a homogeneous solid, soils/gravel, or debris waste. These waste type distinctions, called Summary Category Groups, describe the overall physical form of the waste. Waste that is more difficult to accurately characterize by radiography (such as debris waste) could be subject to a higher number of visual examinations of waste containers to confirm the results of the radiography. Waste that is easily characterized by radiography (such as homogeneous waste) could be subject to a lower number of visual examinations.

#### ***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](http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us). If you prefer, write to:

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