

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

# DOENews



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*For Immediate Release*  
**DOE to Hold Public Information Meetings  
On Proposed Permit Modification**

**CARLSBAD, N.M., July 26, 2000** – The public is invited to comment on a proposed modification to the Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). Submittal of the proposed modification to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) begins a formal review process that includes a 60-day public comment period and two separate public information meetings.

In its request, DOE proposes to increase the above ground storage capacity at WIPP by 25 percent, expand the above ground storage areas and remove the time limit for temporarily storing waste above ground at WIPP before it is disposed.

Additionally, DOE is requesting – for waste characterized at WIPP – to substitute an in-house, NMED-regulated assessment program for the current audit and surveillance program that is used at transuranic waste sites. The audit and surveillance program, as defined in the permit, is a redundant requirement for waste characterized at the WIPP facility because NMED has direct inspection and regulatory authority over hazardous waste activities at all regulated facilities in the state of New Mexico. DOE will continue to implement the permit audit and surveillance program at Los Alamos National Laboratory and transuranic waste sites outside New Mexico that characterize waste for disposal at WIPP.

These modifications are part of a proposed centralized waste characterization facility at WIPP that would be used in lieu of characterization facilities at sites with smaller inventories of transuranic waste. Characterizing and disposing of waste at WIPP is a safe and efficient option for accelerating cleanup of DOE sites nationwide.

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Waste characterization is the process to identify and describe the physical, chemical, and radiological properties of transuranic waste. DOE uses this information to determine whether the waste meets regulatory requirements for disposal at WIPP. DOE can only dispose of waste at WIPP that meets specific disposal criteria defined in the Permit.

The proposed modification conforms to industry standards for handling hazardous materials and does not compromise the safety of the facility, its employees, or the public.

Informational meetings are scheduled for August 29, 2000, in Carlsbad, and August 31, 2000, in Santa Fe. Individuals attending the public information meetings will be provided envelopes addressed to NMED for use in submitting written comments. Written comments will be accepted through September 26, 2000.

All written comments should be sent to Mr. Steve Zappe, New Mexico Environment Department, 2044A Galisteo Street, Santa Fe, NM 87502. Mr. Zappe is also accepting comments by e-mail at [steve\\_zappe@nmenv.state.nm.us](mailto:steve_zappe@nmenv.state.nm.us), or he can be reached by telephone at (505) 827-2425.

The Carlsbad informational meeting will consist of one session – from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. – while the Santa Fe meeting includes two sessions – from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m., and from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. The Carlsbad meeting will be at the Skeen-Whitlock Building, 4021 National Parks Highway. Residents living in northern New Mexico can learn about the proposed modification in Santa Fe at the Courtyard by Marriott, 3347 Cerrillos Road.

The public can obtain more information on the proposed permit modification by logging onto the WIPP Home Page, [http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us/rcradox/rfc/com\\_menu](http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us/rcradox/rfc/com_menu), and from the WIPP Information Center, 4021 National Parks Highway, Carlsbad. The public can also contact Mr. Bob Kehrman at 1-800-336-WIPP (9477). Additionally, WIPP's compliance with the permit can be obtained from NMED.

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 Information Meetings

## On Proposed Class 2 Modification To the Hazardous Waste Facility Permit For the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

**August 29, 2000**  
**6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.**  
**WIPP Information Center**  
**Skeen-Whitlock Building**  
**4021 National Parks Highway**  
**Carlsbad, New Mexico**

**August 31, 2000**  
**2:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.**  
**6:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.**  
**Courtyard by Marriott**  
**3347 Cerrillos Road**  
**Santa Fe, New Mexico**

The purposes of these public information meetings are to:

1. Provide information to the public concerning a proposed Class 2 modification to the Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant
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).

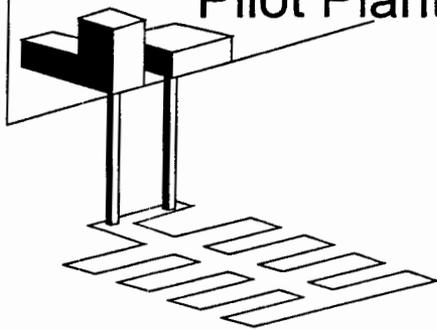
*In its request, DOE proposes to 1) increase the limit on above ground storage capacity at WIPP by 25%, 2) expand the capacity of the above ground storage areas in the WIPP Waste Handling Building, 3) remove the time limit for temporarily storing waste above ground at WIPP, and 4) for waste characterized at WIPP, substitute the in-house, NMED-regulated assessment program for the current audit and surveillance program. These modifications are part of a proposed centralized waste characterization facility at WIPP. **\*Note -- The permittees' record of compliance with the permit is available from Mr. Steve Zappe at the New Mexico Environment Department.***

To obtain information about the Class 2 Permit Modification, contact Mr. Bob Kehrman at the WIPP Information Center, 1-800-336-9477. The permit modification is also available on the WIPP homepage <<http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>> and at the WIPP Information Center, Skeen-Whitlock Building, 4021 Natl.Parks Highway, Carlsbad, NM

**You can send written comments to:**  
Mr. Steve Zappe  
New Mexico Environment Department  
2044A Galisteo Street  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87505  
Phone: (505) 827-2425  
E-mail: [steve\\_zappe@nmenv.state.nm.us](mailto:steve_zappe@nmenv.state.nm.us)  
**Comments accepted until September 26**

## Waste Isolation

## Pilot Plant



## DOE Requests Temporary Authorization To Begin Preliminary Activities for Waste Characterization at WIPP

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

Protecting human health and the environment is of the utmost importance to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). To this end, DOE is making a concerted effort to remove defense-generated transuranic radioactive waste from 23 sites nationwide and permanently dispose of it at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP).

The potential consequences of delays in disposing of these wastes was highlighted by the recent Los Alamos, New Mexico (Cerro Grande) and Hanford, Washington fires that vividly showed the vulnerability of stored transuranic waste. Similar storage situations exist at numerous sites throughout the DOE complex.

About 97 percent of all transuranic waste is at six major sites. The remaining three percent is at 18 sites across the country. Before this waste can be disposed of at WIPP, it must be fully characterized (identified and described).

Many of the smaller DOE sites don't have the facilities or funds to perform this characterization. The proposed solution is to characterize waste to meet U.S. Department of Transportation requirements, then ship it to WIPP where it would be characterized to meet regulatory requirements for disposal. This initiative will allow many sites to remove all transuranic waste from their facility in a relatively short period of time without using substantial resources.

On July 21, 2000, DOE submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) a request to modify the Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for WIPP. The proposed permit modification lays the groundwork for a centralized waste characterization facility at WIPP.

## ***What is DOE Requesting?***

In order to move forward with this initiative, DOE is requesting from NMED temporary authorization to allow certain modifications to the WIPP Waste Handling Building including the installation of analytical instrumentation to perform waste characterization.

Additionally, temporary authorization will allow:

1. WIPP to accept transuranic waste to initiate the necessary testing to verify quality assurance procedures at WIPP
2. Waste shipments to WIPP for disposal characterization
3. Additional above ground storage capacity and storage areas for the receipt of waste requiring disposal characterization
4. Additional above ground storage time for the duration of the temporary authorization and any subsequent extensions of the temporary authorization.

This request is consistent with the Class 2 permit modification submitted by DOE July 21, 2000, to seek full authorization from NMED for additional above ground storage capacity, additional above ground storage areas and elimination of the time limit for above ground temporary storage

## ***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 (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:

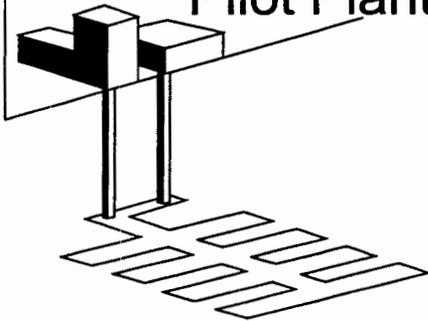
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The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

## Waste Isolation

### Pilot Plant



## DOE Proposes to Modify the Audit and Surveillance Program For Waste Characterized at WIPP

### **Summary and background**

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has proposed a modification to its Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) that would support establishment of a centralized waste characterization facility at WIPP. The proposal requests – for transuranic waste characterized at WIPP – that DOE's in-house, New Mexico Environment Department (NMED)-regulated assessment program be substituted for the current audit and surveillance program. This proposed change, which DOE submitted to the NMED on July 24, 2000, will not adversely affect worker safety, human health, or the environment. The NMED issued the Permit in October 1999.

The intent of the current audit and surveillance program is to ensure transuranic waste sites have implemented and comply with the WIPP Waste Analysis Plan (WAP). Specifically, the WAP establishes requirements for the sites' waste characterization activities.

### **What is Proposed?**

The audit and surveillance program was established so that NMED could indirectly oversee compliance with the WAP at sites located outside of New Mexico. Since the WIPP facility is already under the regulatory authority of NMED, the need for a separate audit program to ensure compliance with the WAP is not necessary for waste characterized at WIPP.

DOE will develop a quality assurance project plan to ensure data generated during waste characterization at WIPP meets regulatory requirements for disposal. Additionally, WIPP will undergo independent procedural and operations assessments in accordance with the quality assurance project plan. These assessments will achieve the same objectives as the current audit and surveillance program.

### **What is Waste Characterization?**

Waste characterization is the process to identify and describe the physical, chemical, and radiological properties of transuranic waste. DOE uses this information to determine whether the waste meets regulatory requirements for disposal at WIPP.

This level of scrutiny will ensure that data generated at WIPP complies with the stringent WAP. Records of these activities will be maintained at WIPP and are available for inspection by NMED at any time. Hazardous waste activities performed at WIPP are under the direct regulatory purview of NMED.

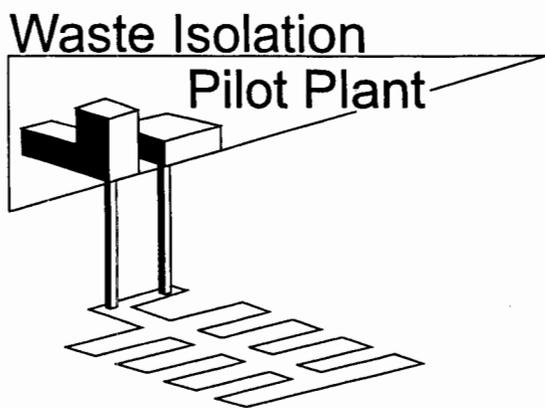
***For more  
Information***

For more information about transuranic waste disposal, or to be placed on the WIPP mailing list, call the WIPP Information Center at 1-800-336-WIPP (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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## **DOE Proposes to Increase Above ground Storage Capacity, Expand Storage Locations, and Duration of Storage**

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

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has proposed a modification to its Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) that would support establishment of a centralized waste characterization facility at WIPP.

As part of a Class 2 modification request, DOE proposes to 1) increase above ground storage capacity for transuranic radioactive waste by 25 percent, 2) remove the time limit for temporarily storing waste above ground at WIPP, and 3) expand the capacity of storage areas within the WIPP Waste Handling Building. These proposed changes, which the DOE submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) on July 24, 2000, will not adversely affect worker safety, human health, or the environment. NMED issued the Permit in October 1999.

The DOE's main priority at WIPP is to safely dispose of transuranic waste from United States defense activities in an expedient, cost-effective and environmentally sound manner so that DOE facilities with this waste can be cleaned up as quickly as possible. The permit requires waste characterization prior to permanent disposal at WIPP. This presents a problem for some DOE sites that are storing only small quantities of transuranic waste and lack the needed characterization facilities.

### **What is Waste Characterization?**

Waste characterization is the process to identify and describe the physical, chemical, and radiological properties of transuranic waste. DOE uses this information to determine whether the waste meets regulatory requirements for disposal at WIPP.

To resolve this problem, DOE is proposing to locate a centralized waste characterization facility at WIPP. Under this proposal, waste would be transported directly to WIPP where it would be characterized for disposal.

***What is  
Proposed?***

In an effort to operate the WIPP facility in an environmentally sound and fiscally responsible manner, DOE proposes the following:

- Modify the existing Permit to increase above ground storage capacity in the Waste Handling Building by 25 percent.

Under the current Permit, DOE is allowed to store 122 cubic meters of transuranic waste on site. An increase of 25 percent would allow DOE to temporarily store an additional 30.7 cubic meters of waste. Coupled with the increase in storage capacity will be an expansion of the storage areas within the Waste Handling Building to allow more effective waste management at WIPP.

- Remove the time limit for temporarily storing waste containers above ground at WIPP before they are permanently disposed underground.

Under the current Permit, DOE is allowed to store waste containers on the surface for 60 days. This change will allow DOE to accept waste for characterization without impacting the receipt of waste for disposal from other DOE sites (e.g., Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site, Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory, and the Hanford Site).

***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 (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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