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Carlsbad Field Office
Waste Isolation Pilot Plant
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DOENews

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For Immediate Release

DOE to Hold Public Information Meetings On Proposed Permit Modification

CARLSBAD, N.M., December 14, 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 next month.

In its request, DOE proposes to modify requirements for Drum Age Criteria (DAC). The current permit does not address the DAC for certain packaging configurations that are anticipated to be typical of mixed transuranic (TRU) waste packages. The DAC determines how long a container of waste is required to sit after it is closed before headspace gas sampling can be performed. This sample must be taken before waste can be accepted at WIPP. The changes proposed to the permit will establish the DAC for those different packaging configurations.

Informational meetings are scheduled for January 9 in Carlsbad and January 11 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 February 9.

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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, or he can be reached by telephone at (505) 827-1557, Ext. 1013.

The Carlsbad informational meeting will consist of one session – from 6 to 8 p.m., while the Santa Fe meeting includes two sessions – from 3 to 5 p.m. and from 6 to 8 p.m. The Carlsbad meeting will be at the Skeen-Whitlock Building, 4021 National Parks Highway. The Santa Fe meetings will be at the Courtyard by Marriott, 3347 Cerrillos Road.

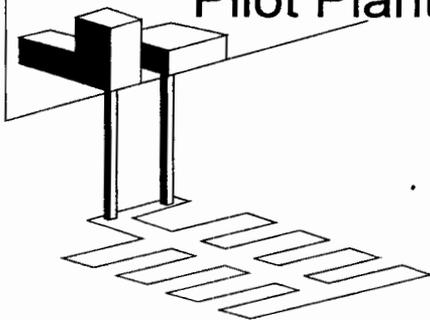
The public can obtain more information on the proposed permit modification by logging onto the WIPP Home Page, <http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>, and from the WIPP Information Center, 4021 National Parks Highway, Carlsbad. The public can also contact Mr. Bob Kehrman at 1-800-336-WIPP (9477). Additionally, information on 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.

Waste Isolation Pilot Plant



DOE Proposes Modification to Hazardous Waste Facility Permit

Drum Age Criteria

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) in support of the DOE cleanup effort.

As part of a Class 2 permit modification request, DOE proposes to modify requirements for Drum Age Criteria (DAC). The current permit does not address certain packaging configurations that are anticipated to be typical of transuranic (TRU) and mixed waste packages. The DAC determines how long a drum of waste is required to sit idle prior to headspace gas sampling being performed. This sample is required for most waste containers to be accepted at WIPP. The changes proposed to the permit take into account additional expected packaging configurations and will determine the DAC (i.e., the amount of time they are required to sit before headspace gas sampling can be accomplished).

These proposed changes, which DOE submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) on December 7, 2000, will not adversely affect worker safety, human health, or the environment.

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 storing this waste can be cleaned up as quickly as possible. The permit requires that a headspace gas sample be obtained from each container prior to disposal at WIPP. In order to assure that these samples represent the entire container, NMED specified a minimum number of days a container must sit after packaging before it can be sampled.

In determining the DAC, consideration must be given to the "number of layers of confinement" inside a container and the rate at which the gases pass through those confinement layers. In other words, a drum containing waste that is inside three plastic bags will have a lower DAC than a drum containing waste that is inside five plastic bags.

The permit establishes that drum age must ensure that headspace gas has reached a 90 percent steady-state concentration within each layer of confinement. The DAC values in the permit were established for five layers of plastic bags as a bounding condition for debris waste and two layers for homogeneous solids and soils and gravel. The permit did not consider other specific packaging configurations that occur in TRU waste containers.

***What is
Proposed?***

In an effort to expedite the disposal of transuranic waste in a cost-effective and environmentally sound manner and to correct inconsistencies in the DACs in the permit, the DOE proposes the following:

- Modify the existing permit to include DAC values for specific waste packaging configurations for three different headspace gas sampling scenarios
- Eliminate an inconsistency within the permit when using the term "unvented rigid container greater than 4 liters"

In all cases the 90 percent of steady-state criterion is maintained to ensure that samples are representative.

***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). You also may visit the WIPP Home Page at <http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>.

If you prefer, write to:



WIPP Information Center
U.S. Department of Energy
Carlsbad Field Office
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Carlsbad Field Office
Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

Public Information Meetings

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



January 9, 2001
6 - 8 p.m.
WIPP Information Center
Skeen-Whitlock Building
4021 National Parks Highway
Carlsbad, New Mexico

January 11, 2001
3 - 5 p.m.
6 - 8 p.m.
Courtyard by Marriott
3347 Cerrillos Road
Santa Fe, New Mexico

The U.S. Department of Energy Carlsbad Field Office is hosting public meetings 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 among the public, the facility's owner (U.S. Department of Energy), the management and operating contractor (Westinghouse Waste Isolation Division), and the regulatory agency (New Mexico Environment Department).

In its request, DOE proposes to modify requirements for Drum Age Criteria (DAC). The current permit does not address certain packaging configurations that are anticipated to be typical of mixed TRU waste packages. The DAC determines how long a drum of waste is required to sit idle prior to headspace gas sampling being performed. This sample must be taken for waste to be accepted at the WIPP facility. The changes proposed to the permit will allow for different packaging configurations and will determine the amount of time they are required to sit before headspace gas sampling can be accomplished.

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 National Parks Highway, Carlsbad, New Mexico.

You can send written comments to:
Mr. Steve Zappe
New Mexico Environment Department
2044A Galisteo Street
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87505
Phone: (505) 827-1557 Ext. 1013
E-mail: steve_zappe@nmenv.state.nm.us
Comments accepted until:
February 9, 2001