



TRU Progress

TRU Progress is changing!

A Publication of the U.S. Department of Energy Carlsbad Field Office

Volume 6

Issue 2

Spring 2001



Advisory Group Bypasses WIPP as Underground Lab

Other astrophysics experiments still may proceed



Congressman Joe Skeen (left) and Senator Pete Domenici address the media during a news conference in Carlsbad.

An advisory committee to the National Science Foundation in March recommended that an underground laboratory to detect neutrinos be located in South Dakota rather than at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO) officials are disappointed but are upbeat that

other astrophysics experiments will be suited for WIPP.

"We would have liked to have the endorsement of the committee for the underground laboratory," said Roger Nelson, CBFO Chief Scientist, "but there are still many scientists in the astrophysics community who are intending to site their experiments at WIPP."

Several WIPP features are attractive to astrophysics researchers,

including the 2,000 feet of rock overlying the repository that absorbs most cosmic rays, low concentrations of naturally occurring radioactive elements in the salt rock, and a sophisticated infrastructure and workforce capable of supporting studies by universities and national labs.

WIPP could play an integral role in answering some of the most interesting questions of modern astronomy and cosmology.

The advisory committee met in Carlsbad in February to evaluate WIPP. U.S. Senator Pete Domenici and Representative Joe Skeen were also there to lend their support for the underground laboratory.

After the committee's announcement, Domenici said "I commend the Carlsbad community and WIPP personnel for their work in supporting this evaluation, and encourage them to continue to pursue a broad range of scientific experiments that benefit from the WIPP environment." □

DOE Eliminates Persistent "Cookies" from Home Page
Page 2

WIPP Hazardous Waste Permit Evolving
Page 3

WIPP Employees Achieve Safety Milestone

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DOE Eliminating Persistent "Cookies" from WIPP Home Page

The DOE's Carlsbad Field Office is eliminating the generation of persistent "cookies" by the WIPP home page. In computer terms, a "cookie" is a file produced when someone visits an Internet site.

One type of cookie is called a *session* cookie. These files assist users in searching a Web site for information. Session cookies are temporary and remove themselves when users exit a site.

A *persistent* cookie, however, is saved on a computer's hard drive, making it possible to access information about the user during subsequent visits to a Web site. Government agencies' Web sites are not allowed to generate persistent cookies.

WIPP has used commercial search engine software since last fall. The Carlsbad Field Office was unaware of the software's persistent cookie-generating feature until being informed by the DOE's Office of the Inspector General.

DOE does not, and has not, used cookies to collect any personal information about visitors to the WIPP home page. □

Public information

DOE to Launch New Format for *TRU Progress* Newsletter

T*RU Progress* is about to undergo a major change. This issue is the last to be printed and mailed out. In its place, the Carlsbad Field Office will soon launch *TRU Progress Online*, an electronic newsletter that will be available on the WIPP home page.

A major advantage to the new format will be cost savings.

The cost of printing, labeling, bulk mail sorting, and postage will be eliminated, saving thousands of dollars each year.

New features of *TRU Progress Online* will include:

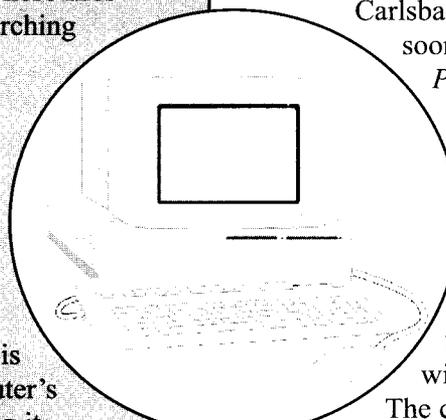
- Full-color graphics and photos
- More in-depth articles
- Hyperlinks to referenced documents, press releases, and other sites of interest

- Stakeholder feedback and comment capability
- Free subscription service for e-mail notification of updates

"We're excited about the new format," said Dennis Hurtt, Team Leader for the CBFO's Office of Public Affairs. "We think that it will provide more information than the limited four-page printed version and will reach a much wider audience."

Stakeholders can sign up for an e-mail notification when the online newsletter is updated. To do so, simply send an e-mail message with your name and address to: subscribe_tru@wipp.carlsbad.nm.us. A printer-friendly version will also be available for stakeholders who want to print it and read it later or save it for future reference. Stakeholders who do not have access to the Internet may call the WIPP Information Center for a black and white copy.

Publication of *TRU Progress* began in 1995. Previous issues are available on the WIPP home page. □



WIPP Shipment Summary

As of April 26, 2001

Site	Shipments
Hanford Site	6
Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory	61
Los Alamos National Laboratory	18
Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site	125
TOTAL	210

WIPP Hazardous Waste Permit Evolving

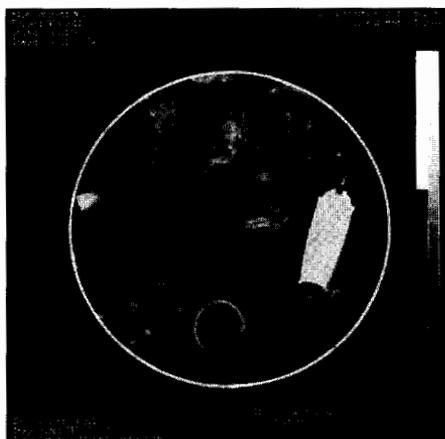
The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) Hazardous Waste Facility Permit is less than two years old, but it already has been changed and improved. The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) first issued the permit in October 1999 and, almost immediately afterward the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) began submitting requests to modify it.

Experience and hindsight from the time the permit application was submitted until the time it was issued led to the identification of early permit modification requests. As the DOE transuranic waste complex began to operate under the permit's regulatory framework, it became clear that strategic modification requests were necessary to optimize permit implementation.

DOE must follow a set process for submitting the modification requests and for ensuring public notification and involvement. Modification requests are categorized according to their impact on the permit and the level

of public involvement is set according to NMED requirements.

Although NMED has approved some changes, not all permit modification requests are approved.



The sample image shows an aerosol can with free liquid inside. This is a prohibited item at WIPP and can be identified without opening the waste container using new technology.

NMED recently rejected a request that would have shortened the amount of time some waste containers have to sit before testing for headspace gases that accumulate at the top of the container.

DOE is currently working on a modification request regarding visual examination. The

change would allow the use of digital radiography/computed tomography (DR/CT) to confirm that items not permitted at WIPP are not in the waste. This would reduce risk to workers that would otherwise be required to open the container. DR/CT is similar to a CAT scan used to aid doctors in accurately diagnosing human ailments without invasive surgery.

Coming Soon

Stakeholders can expect other permit modification requests to be submitted in the near future. One is a resubmittal of a permit

modification that would allow DOE to characterize waste for transportation at sites and then conduct confirmation analysis at a centralized facility at WIPP upon arrival.

This approach could save the cost of expensive characterization facilities at 17 smaller sites, accelerate the cleanup of sites where there are only small amounts of transuranic waste, and eventually help accelerate the rate at which larger sites could prepare waste for shipment to WIPP.

Also in the near future is a permit modification request to allow the disposal of remote-handled waste at WIPP. The WIPP Land Withdrawal Act authorizes the use of WIPP for contact-handled and remote-handled waste, however, the hazardous waste permit only allows for contact-handled waste at this time.

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Westinghouse TRU Solutions LLC Awarded Management and Operating Contract

DOE has awarded a \$500 million, five-year contract for the management and operation of WIPP to Westinghouse TRU Solutions LLC. Based in Carlsbad, the company was formed by Westinghouse Government Environmental Services Company LLC and Roy F. Weston, Inc. The new contract began February 1. □



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(1-800-336-9477)
infocntr@wipp.carlsbad.nm.us

WIPP Home Page
www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us

3-DIGIT 875
New Mexico Environment Department
Steve Zappe
PO Box 26110
SANTA FE NM 87502-0110



TRU is the acronym for **transuranic**, the U.S. Department of Energy's classification of radioactive waste disposed of at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant.

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*Is this the LAST issue
of TRU Progress?
See page 2 for details.*



Safety

WIPP Employees Achieve Safety Milestone

On February 19, workers at WIPP achieved a major safety milestone. Despite significant changes at WIPP in the last couple of years, employees recorded 2 million man-hours of work without a lost-time accident.

A lost-time accident is one that causes a work-day absence due to an accident or occupational illness. The hours recorded are productive hours only so they do not include vacation or sick days. According to the National Safety Council, facilities

2

with the same industry code as WIPP lose an average of 164.8 man-hours each year to accidents.

“Safety is at the core of all WIPP operations,” said Dr. Inés Triay, Manager of the DOE’s Carlsbad Field Office. “We are particularly pleased that WIPP workers reached the 2

million mark during the time in which they mined a new panel and increased shift work.”

The milestone includes all work dating back to December 10, 1999.

This, however, is not the first time WIPP has reached this milestone. WIPP reached 2 million man-hours with no lost-time accidents in December 1993. In March 1992, WIPP reached the 3 million mark.

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