

News Advisory from

The Snake River Alliance



Aug. 29, 2002

Nuclear Watchdog Groups Asks DOE-Idaho to Better Inform Idahoans

Snake River Alliance executive director Gary Richardson today urged the US Department of Energy Idaho Office to fully inform the people of Idaho about a shipment of plutonium-contaminated waste that is being returned to Idaho from New Mexico. [see attached letter]

The Idaho nuclear watchdog group learned late yesterday from a colleague group in New Mexico that a shipping container on a truck involved in a collision with a pickup truck near the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant at Carlsbad, NM was being returned to Idaho. While being inspected for acceptance at WIPP, airborne radioactivity was discovered inside one of the shipping containers on the truck from INEEL. Several air samples were collected, each confirming the presence of airborne levels of radioactivity inside the container.

According to a report released in New Mexico, the inner vessel could not be opened at WIPP because of the potential for contaminating the inside of the waste handling building if the inner container were opened and further testing or decontamination were performed at WIPP. Therefore, the DOE re-sealed the outer container and shipped the waste back to INEEL for evaluation.

A copy of the report issued by the DOE-Carlsbad office is available upon request.



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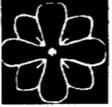
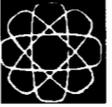
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Snake River Alliance

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August 29, 2002

Warren E. Bergholz, Acting Manager
DOE-Idaho
850 Energy Dr.
Idaho Falls, Idaho 83402
Sent via email attachment to berghowe@inel.gov

Dear Mr. Bergholz:

The Snake River Alliance has learned that a shipment of plutonium-contaminated waste sent from INEEL to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico is en route back to Idaho. As you know, WIPP has received more than 1,100 shipments in the past three years, and this is the first that has been returned. According to the report released to the people in New Mexico, the INEEL shipment was rejected because the inner vessel of a shipping container is too contaminated to open, let alone unload, at WIPP.

We strongly urge the Idaho Office of the Department of Energy to keep the people of Idaho fully informed about this matter, including the current shipment and the investigation of how radioactivity in the inner vessel became airborne. We also suggest that, until all questions about this matter are resolved, INEEL suspend plutonium shipments to WIPP.

Sincerely,

Gary E. Richardson
Executive Director