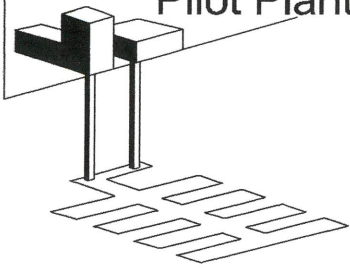


Waste Isolation
Pilot Plant



Fact Sheet



May 13, 2003



DOE Proposes Modification To Hazardous Waste Facility Permit

Removal of Underground Booster Fans

Background The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has proposed a modification to its Hazardous Waste Facility Permit (HWFP) for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) to provide greater support to the DOE environmental cleanup effort.

The existing HWFP requires the WIPP facility to maintain booster fans in the underground. Specifically, the permit refers to an airflow reversal mode of operation of the underground ventilation system to control the spread of fire, smoke, and toxic gases in the event of an underground fire to allow for the safe evacuation of personnel from the underground. The booster fans were originally installed in the 1980s to provide ventilation air during construction activities.

When the permit application was submitted in the 1990s, it was thought that this airflow reversal capability was needed to comply with federal Mine Safety and Health Administration regulations for ventilation control. Experts have since determined that airflow reversal using the booster fans does not aid in protecting workers or the environment.

What is Proposed? DOE submitted a Class 2 permit modification request to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) on May 13, 2003, to remove all references to booster fans and airflow reversal modes of operation in the underground ventilation system.

The WIPP ventilation system was upgraded with the addition of the Air Intake Shaft (AIS) and additional surface fans. These additions negated the need for booster fans in the underground. WIPP seeks to remove these booster fans from the permit because:



- The booster fans are not needed to supply ventilation air to the WIPP underground;
- The spread of fire, smoke, or toxic gases in the event of a fire can be more safely controlled using devices other than the booster fans (i.e., control doors);
- Use of the booster fans to control the spread of fire, smoke, or toxic gases in an actual emergency could result in unintentional adverse consequences for workers attempting to escape the underground;
- Various experts in mine ventilation engineering and safety, including those at the Mine Safety and Health Administration as well as the New Mexico Bureau of Mine Inspection have determined that the booster fans are not needed to protect the health and safety of WIPP workers;
- The booster fans are not necessary to protect the environment, or otherwise satisfy any RCRA hazardous waste regulation, or any requirement under the New Mexico Hazardous Waste Act.

Comments

Comments for the record must be sent to Mr. Steve Zappe, New Mexico Environment Department, 2905 Rodeo Park Drive, Building 1, Santa Fe, NM 87505. They may also be e-mailed: steve_zappe@nmenv.state.nm.us or faxed to 505-428-2567. Only written comments will be accepted and must be received no later than 5:00 p.m. MDT on July 14, 2003. A copy of the permit modification may be viewed or copied at the NMED offices of Mr. Zappe. To be placed on the WIPP mailing list, contact Mr. Zappe at the address above.

For more information

For more information about transuranic waste shipments and procedures, call the WIPP Information Center at 1-800-336-WIPP (9477). You also may visit the WIPP Home Page at <http://www.wipp.ws>. Comments to the Permittees regarding this permit modification may be sent to Mr. Bobby St. John, Washington TRU Solutions, P.O. Box 2078, Carlsbad, NM 88221.