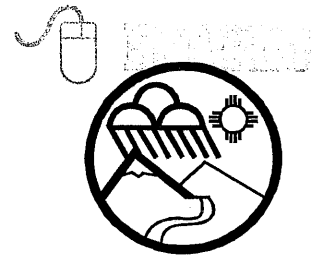


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Immediate Release

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DOE Mistake Leads to Improper Waste Shipment to WIPP; Environment Department Concerned with Repeated Waste Analysis Failures

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) has learned that a recent shipment of radioactive waste from the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory (INEEL) to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) near Carlsbad violated state and federal requirements. These requirements are in place to ensure that all waste shipped to WIPP can be disposed of safely.

This shipment of mixed waste from INEEL's Advanced Mixed Waste Treatment Facility was received by WIPP in the early morning hours of Wednesday, July 14. Once received it was offloaded and stored in WIPP's Waste Handling Building.

"I am extremely disappointed in this DOE leadership failure," said NMED Secretary Ron Curry. "I believe that this mistake is another symptom of the poor communication at the highest levels of DOE."

NMED was notified of this problem Wednesday evening after another waste shipment headed to WIPP from INEEL was turned around in Trinidad, Colorado. WIPP communicated to NMED that it could not be sure that the waste in the shipment met all the required WIPP criteria because the proper solid sampling had not been completed. At this time, WIPP also notified NMED that a shipment of the same waste had already been received and offloaded that morning. NMED now believes DOE may have been making these shipments since March.

"WIPP's permit specifically lays out which wastes are allowable for disposal at the site," Secretary Curry continued. "These safety precautions are designed to protect the people of Carlsbad and citizens living along the state's WIPP routes. DOE's failure in this case calls into question their ability to consistently follow these permit requirements."

These mistakes follow closely on the heels of a similar problem reported in June. On June 9 the DOE ordered a waste shipment to WIPP be turned around in Pecos, Texas because of concerns about a waste container's contents. DOE was concerned that this shipment from the Savannah River Site in South Carolina may have contained a large sealed container prohibited at WIPP. Once the truck was returned to South Carolina, DOE determined that no prohibited items were present in the shipment.

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“A pattern seems to be emerging from these repeated failures,” said Secretary Curry. “I sincerely hope DOE will take swift action to improve their waste analysis procedures. In the future, DOE must be 100 percent certain of what is in these trucks before they hit the road.”

NMED’s permit now gives WIPP five days to submit a detailed written report on this incident. DOE must also put in place accelerated corrective action plans to solve this problem. In addition to these actions, NMED will review all information received, investigate this matter and possibly take further enforcement action including issuing a compliance order with monetary penalties.

“While there does not appear to be any increased danger to health or the environment because of these DOE mistakes, NMED still feels a strong responsibility to make this information public,” said Secretary Curry. “As we have in the past, we will continue to share information with the citizens of New Mexico as quickly and as completely as possible.”

“This breakdown of waste certification procedures is especially concerning given DOE’s effort to change WIPP’s Waste Analysis Plan,” Secretary Curry added. “A permit modification currently pending with NMED would limit state oversight of waste analysis activities, in essence, asking us to simply trust DOE on what’s in these drums. That doesn’t appear to be something the state can afford to do.”

For further information contact Jon Goldstein, Communications Director, NMED at (505) 827-0314.

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