

September 7, 2004

Steve Zappe
New Mexico Environment Department
2905 Rodeo Park Drive, Building 1
Santa Fe, NM 87505



RE: DOE High-Level Waste WIPP Permit Modification request

Dear Mr. Zappe:

The undersigned organizations are strongly opposed to high-level waste (HLW) storage or disposal at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). HLW is extremely dangerous and should not ever be allowed at WIPP. Further, HLW is prohibited by federal law for storage or disposal at WIPP.

We urge the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) to include a clear prohibition in the WIPP operating permit against any waste that has been classified or managed as HLW by the Department of Energy (DOE) from being stored or disposed at WIPP. NMED should not allow any of the HLW that DOE "renames" to be stored or disposed at WIPP.

NMED must not approve the DOE's incomplete permit modification request related to tank waste, which is inadequate to protect public health and safety.

The DOE request does not specifically include all of the more than 100 million gallons of liquid waste and sludge stored in 243 tanks at Hanford, Washington, the Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina, and the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory (INEEL) or the sludges from high-level waste and spent fuel storage at those sites. For decades, the highly radioactive waste in those tanks has been considered to be extremely dangerous. Such wastes would endanger present and future generations and are not appropriate for storage or disposal at WIPP.

The 1992 federal law clearly prohibits high-level waste at WIPP. At the time that law was passed, Congress understood that the waste in the tanks at Hanford, SRS, and INEEL were prohibited from WIPP. Congress has not changed that law and DOE and NMED should abide by the law.

Moreover, such HLW would be transported through much of the state, threatening the health and safety of thousands of New Mexicans.

Thus, we strongly oppose HLW at WIPP. We strongly urge the NMED to prohibit any waste that has been classified or managed as HLW from being stored or disposed at WIPP.

Thank you very much for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

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