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U.S. Department of Energy
Office of Inspector General
Office of Audits and Inspections

Audit Report

The Office of Environmental Management's Disposition of Transuranic Waste

OAS-L-13-09

May 2013

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Department of Energy
Washington, DC 20585

May 28, 2013

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR WASTE
MANAGEMENT

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Sedillo".

FROM: David Sedillo, Director
Western Audits Division
Office of Inspector General

SUBJECT: INFORMATION: Audit Report on "The Office of Environmental
Management's Disposition of Transuranic Waste"

BACKGROUND

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) is the Department of Energy's (Department) underground repository for contact-handled (CH) and remote-handled (RH) transuranic (TRU) waste. The WIPP Land Withdrawal Act limits WIPP's total capacity for TRU waste to 175,600 cubic meters (m³), of which no more than 7,080 m³ can be RH waste. Under the Act, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regulates repository waste disposal operations and shares that responsibility with the State of New Mexico. In October 1999, the New Mexico Environment Department (New Mexico) granted a Hazardous Waste Facility Permit to the Department to begin storage and disposal of TRU waste, although RH disposal did not commence until 2007. The Permit requires approval by New Mexico of any planned changes to the permitted facility that may result in noncompliance with permit requirements.

At the beginning of Fiscal Year (FY) 2011, the Office of Environmental Management (EM) established a strategic goal, in addition to operational goals, to complete disposition of 90 percent of the Department's legacy TRU waste by the end of FY 2015. While EM is also responsible for the TRU waste that the Department continues to generate, newly generated waste is not specifically included in the strategic goal. To achieve the 90 percent goal, EM needed to dispose of approximately 40,000 m³ of waste, or an average of 8,000 m³ per year. EM did not establish specific goals for CH or RH disposal within the overall metric. The planned annual metric was reduced to 6,000 m³ for FY 2012 and 4,500 m³ for FY 2013 because of funding limitations. We initiated this audit to determine whether EM was effectively managing and disposing of its TRU waste relative to its strategic 90 percent waste disposal goal.

RESULTS OF AUDIT

We found that while EM had made progress in meeting its operational disposal goals, it was not on track to meet its goal to dispose of 90 percent of the Department's legacy TRU waste by the end of FY 2015. In particular, EM faces a number of challenges in meeting its planned 90