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 @WIPPNews

WIPP UPDATE: March 15, 2014

The public has asked a number of questions at recent Town Hall meetings. In an effort to share this information, we have provided some of the questions and corresponding answers. More will follow.

3-6-14 DOE-hosted Town Hall meeting-Carlsbad

Q. What is a bioassay test?

A. A bioassay test determines the kinds, quantities or concentrations, and, in some cases, the locations of radioactive material in the human body. This is accomplished by measuring radiation within the body by lung counting or by analyzing radioactive material in urine or fecal samples.

Q. Why does one test show positive and another negative?

A. Different tests have different sensitivities and detection capabilities. For example, lung counting provides fast results but the test is less sensitive and can't detect all radioactive materials; chest wall thickness also affects the results. Excretion analyses are able to detect very small amounts of radioactive material in the body. Results, however, generally take a long time and many variables can come into play.

Of the 13 WIPP workers, none tested positive in the chest counts, which indicates they have no detectable radioactive contamination deep in their lungs. These results were confirmed by the Centers for Disease Control.

Q. What indicated the initial 13 employees had possible contamination?

A. Initial fecal samples measured some radioactivity above normal background levels; follow-up urine samples show no detectable amounts of radioactivity.

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Q. Is there concern that the release was related to the fire event?

A. It is highly unlikely due to the distance between the location of the salt haul truck fire and the continuous air monitor (CAM) that detected airborne radiation. Personnel were in the underground on Feb. 13 and the morning and afternoon of Feb. 14; no airborne contamination was present. Filters analyzed from the underground exhaust on the morning of Feb. 15 contained isotopes consistent with transuranic waste, making a connection between events highly unlikely.

Q. Does WIPP have emergency response plans? Are plans coordinated with local responders?

A. Yes. WIPP has emergency response plans at the facility and ongoing cooperative agreements with emergency management and emergency services in Eddy and Lea counties. Those agencies are notified when there is an emergency at WIPP. Depending on the nature of the emergency, the official response agency would determine if public protective actions were needed, such as road closure to WIPP. It is important to note that WIPP is centered on 16 sections (16 square miles) of land in a remote area 26 miles southeast of Carlsbad.

Q. When will we see release data from WIPP?

A. Available data results are posted on the WIPP Web Page at www.wipp.energy.gov Recovery Information Center.