

DOE: Increased radiation in Carlsbad not related to WIPP incidents

By Zack Ponce

zponce@currentargus.com

@zackponce12 on Twitter

POSTED: 03/17/2014 05:30:47 PM MDT



- >> [Timeline of events \(http://www.currentargus.com/ci_25314787/\)](http://www.currentargus.com/ci_25314787/)
- >> [Frequently Asked Questions \(http://www.currentargus.com/ci_25315093/\)](http://www.currentargus.com/ci_25315093/)
- >> [Photo gallery: WIPP's 15 year history, from the first shipment to the radiation leak \(http://photos.currentargus.com/2014/03/11/photos-wipp-timeline-from-first-shipment-to-radiation-leak/#1\)](http://photos.currentargus.com/2014/03/11/photos-wipp-timeline-from-first-shipment-to-radiation-leak/#1)

CARLSBAD -- Radiation levels appear to be on the rise in Carlsbad and around the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant.

Air monitoring results since last month's radiation leak appear to show the amount of radiation trending upward near Carlsbad, but Department of Energy officials say there is no proof it is related to the leak.

A DOE air monitor stationed on Carlsbad's eastern border, near the Bureau of Land Management office on Greene Street, has shown an uptick of radiation from 1.6 disintegrations per minute (DPM) on Feb. 18, to 7.1 DPM as recently as March 4. DPM measures the amount of radioactive contamination from alpha and beta rays in an area. Similar increases were also detected at the DOE's six other monitoring stations scattered throughout eastern Eddy County.



[/portlet/article](#)

[/html/imageDisplay.jsp?contentItemRelationshipId=5801339](http://html/imageDisplay.jsp?contentItemRelationshipId=5801339)

processed by
IntelliTune on
28032013 175943
with script 11*New -
blk-new SUB

Roger Nelson, chief scientist for the DOE's Carlsbad Field Office, said air sample screening analyses showing a radiation peak on March 4 was nothing more than background readings and emphasized that there's no hazard for humans or the surrounding environment.

"No, it absolutely does not point to that fact," Nelson said, responding to rampant rumors that leaked plutonium and americium has been spreading from the nuclear waste repository site and into Carlsbad, 26 miles away.

DOE and WIPP officials were forced on the defensive after an article claiming that 14 million residents in New Mexico, Texas and Chihuahua, Mexico were potentially in harm's way spread throughout cyberspace over the weekend and continued into Monday.

"There is absolutely no basis for these rumors," the Department of Energy said in a news release on Monday evening. "Monitoring conducted by Nuclear Waste Partnership of air, soil, water and vegetation are showing no radiation releases that would approach levels causing health concerns."

The initial radiation leak registered at 36 DPM at the WIPP site, and Nelson said only a number more than 20 DPM or would cause him to think the radiation was elevated over background levels for the region.

More thorough analysis from the same air monitors showed no detectable amounts of americium or plutonium - the types of radiation release from the WIPP site - which Nelson says shows the radiation is not related to the leak at WIPP. Russell Hardy, director of the Carlsbad Environmental Monitoring and



[/portlet/article](#)

[/html/imageDisplay.jsp?contentItemRelationshipId=5801338](http://html/imageDisplay.jsp?contentItemRelationshipId=5801338)

1403109



Research Center, agreed.

"I wouldn't say it's harmful at all," Hardy said. "I think it's a gross overreaction."

CEMRC, an entity of New Mexico State University operating with DOE funding, has also independently tested the air surrounding WIPP for radioactive particles. Hardy said no threat exists for Southeastern New Mexicans.

Nelson said that air samples have previously tested high for radiation prior to February's incidents because there is naturally-occurring radiation on the planet, combined with the dormant particles from nuclear weapons testing decades ago in Southeastern New Mexico, including the Trinity Site at White Sands Missile Range, and Gnome Site 25 miles southeast of Carlsbad.

"If I take a sample and suck air through a filter, I'm going to get 1,000 counts DPM and then it's going to slowly go away and reason is because I'm just letting the sample decay away," Nelson said. "You're breathing in those radon dotters right now."

A news release said officials will present additional environmental monitoring data at Thursday's regularly scheduled town hall meeting, scheduled for 5:30 p.m. at the Carlsbad City Council chambers.

Reporter Zack Ponce can be reached at (575) 689-7402.

RELATED ([HTTP://WWW.LCSUN-NEWS.COM/LAS_CRUCES-NEWS](http://WWW.LCSUN-NEWS.COM/LAS_CRUCES-NEWS))

[Las Cruces church to close temporary migrant shelter \(http://www.lcsun-news.com/las_cruces-news/ci_26274093/las-cruces-church-close-temporary-migrant-shelter\)](http://www.lcsun-news.com/las_cruces-news/ci_26274093/las-cruces-church-close-temporary-migrant-shelter)

[Unsigned contract with city leads to closure of Las Cruces PAL Boxing Gym \(http://www.lcsun-news.com/las_cruces-news/ci_26275012/unsigned-contract-city-leads-closure-las-cruces-pal\)](http://www.lcsun-news.com/las_cruces-news/ci_26275012/unsigned-contract-city-leads-closure-las-cruces-pal)

[Chile harvest ramps up across Doña Ana County \(http://www.lcsun-news.com/las_cruces-news/ci_26273441/chile-harvest-ramps-up-across-dona-ana-county\)](http://www.lcsun-news.com/las_cruces-news/ci_26273441/chile-harvest-ramps-up-across-dona-ana-county)

Offers and articles from around the Web

ADVERTISEMENT



New Rule in New Mexico: Do Not Pay Your Next Car Insurance Bill Until You Read This...



These shocking photos may suggest some unsettling things about the customs of folks in Russia.



Santa Fe arrest records. Who do you know?



Rare Ingredients Help Reduce Neuropathy Nerve Pain