



U.S. Department of Energy
Carlsbad Field Office
Waste Isolation Pilot Plant
P.O. Box 3090
Carlsbad, New Mexico 88221

Media Contact:
Bradley Bugger
U.S. DOE Carlsbad Field Office
(575) 234-7309

www.wipp.energy.gov

 @WIPPNews

WIPP UPDATES: March 19, 2014

First Step to Replace WIPP HEPA Filters

An aerosol test is planned to verify that the WIPP high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters are still operating at their peak performance. The HEPA filters worked as designed on February 14, trapping more than 99.9% of the radioactive particles exhausted from the underground. A minute amount of radioactive contamination was released during the event, due to a design in the ventilation system that allowed a small amount of air to bypass the filtration system. That design feature has been changed so that the bypass no longer exists. Los Alamos National Laboratory will pump aerosolized oil through the filter banks and use highly sensitive equipment to measure the concentration of aerosol particles at the back of the filter banks to determine filter efficiency.

Individual HEPA filters at WIPP are tested annually and consistently meet the efficiency standard. Two filter banks service the underground exhaust.

WIPP Safety Evaluation Prepares for Manned Entry

A safety evaluation has identified a set of controls that are essential to sending personnel into the underground facility. The contractor included these safety controls in a manned re-entry plan that has been submitted to DOE for approval. The plan includes operational restrictions and establishes interim controls to ensure the underground ventilation and filtration system remains in service and provides safe habitability of the site and the protection of the public and the environment.

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The Mine Safety and Health Administration compliance inspections of both the air intake and salt hoists and shafts are required before personnel are allowed access to the underground facility. Once those requirements are met, personnel will enter the facility to examine the shaft from the salt station to the air intake station and take air samples, ensuring there are two safe exits from the mine. A later entry will allow personnel to identify the event scene and source of the release. These activities will occur over the coming weeks.

Health Care Advocates Reach Out to Employees

All employees who were at the site on February 15, the day after the radiological release, have the opportunity to request a whole body count. A whole body count, also known as a chest count, measures radioactive contamination deep in the lungs. No adverse health impacts are expected for any employees from the radiation release event.

Community Meetings Scheduled

March 20 – Carlsbad Mayor Dale Janway and DOE will co-host a Town Hall meeting Thursday, March 20, featuring updates on WIPP recovery activities and recent environmental monitoring results. Fran Williams, Director of Environmental, Safety, Health and Quality for Oak Ridge National Laboratory's contractor UCOR, will be present to answer questions. She has 35 years of experience in ESH&Q, health physics and occupational medicine.

The town hall meetings are held at 5:30 p.m. every Thursday at the Carlsbad City Council Chambers, 101 N. Halagueno Street.

March 25 – WIPP officials will update the Artesia City Council on WIPP recovery activities at 7:00 p.m. Location: 511 W. Texas Ave., Artesia.