



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 6
1445 ROSS AVENUE, SUITE 1200
DALLAS, TEXAS 75202 – 2733



March 5, 2014

Office of the Regional Administrator
NMED
Hazardous Waste Bureau

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

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Dear Senator Heinrich:

I am writing in response to your letter of February 27, 2014, in which you requested deployment of U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's assets to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) to conduct independent studies subsequent to the February 14 radiation release. We are still evaluating the situation; however, I wanted to explain the actions we have taken to this point.

In addition to ongoing communication with the state of New Mexico Environment Department and Department of Energy and review of data generated by these and other sources, staffs from the Region 6 office in Dallas are in Carlsbad to provide assistance to our partner federal, state and local agencies. The state of New Mexico, together with the DOE and New Mexico State University, deployed fifteen air monitors in the area, and the State continues to determine if additional monitors are warranted. We are also coordinating with state and local authorities, as well as the DOE, to determine if the EPA assistance by employing the EPA's monitoring and analytical capabilities is helpful to verify or supplement the existing efforts. The EPA headquarters is coordinating internally with Region 6 offices, our National Analytical Radiation Environmental Laboratory in Montgomery, Alabama, and our National Center for Radiation Field Operations in Las Vegas, Nevada, to ensure that the EPA's overall response is appropriate and effective.

As you know, the EPA's primary regulatory responsibility is to ensure that any releases of radioactive material from the WIPP facility are below the EPA exposure limits for members of the public. As part of our regulatory oversight, we inspect the DOE's procedures for responding to unintended releases of radioactivity. While complete laboratory analyses are not yet available for environmental samples taken so far, initial field measurements combined with modeling of potential public exposures indicate that it is very unlikely that any exposures would approach these regulatory limits or represent a public health concern. In addition, we note that the available information supports the conclusion that nearly all of the radioactive material was retained within the filtration system, indicating that the system performed as designed when radiation was detected in the underground. Measurements taken over time also indicate that radiation levels have declined significantly since the initial incident, to levels comparable to the normal background readings.

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I hope this information is useful. We will continue to provide your office with updates so that you and your constituents can have confidence that the EPA is taking the appropriate actions to protect public health and the environment. For more information, please contact me at (214) 665-2200, or have your staff contact Mr. Austin Vela, Congressional Liaison, at (214) 665-9792.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ron Curry", written over a horizontal line.

Ron Curry
Regional Administrator

Identical letter sent to: The Honorable Tom Udall
United States Senate