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WIPP UPDATE: Planning Continues for Manned Entry

PERSONNEL ENTRY OF THE MINE

After this weekend's successful probe entry into the Salt Handling and Air Intake Shafts at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, plans to send personnel into the mine to learn the cause of the recent radiation release are being developed and reviewed. WIPP personnel will perform Mine Safety and Health Administration-required inspections of both the Salt Handling and Air Intake Shafts this week. If all of the inspections go well, personnel entries are expected some time in the next couple of weeks. A series of personnel entries is planned to safely characterize the mine's stability and attempt to identify the source of the release.

DAMPER CLOSURE

A damper system that's designed to allow .4 percent of airflow to bypass the air filtration system during filtration operations has been sealed with a high-density foaming material. Before sealing the dampers, a small amount of unfiltered air was released to the atmosphere; the WIPP ventilation system is more than 99 percent efficient in trapping radioactive particles. Monitoring after the sealing of the dampers shows that leakage past the dampers has been stopped. Nuclear Waste Partnership, the WIPP management and operating contractor, is looking at alternatives to ensure there is no leakage in the future caused by long-term degradation of the foam.

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AIR MONITORING DATA

We continue to post new air monitoring data on our web site as it becomes available. Data generated so far continues to show no significant contamination has been released off-site, and there are no negative impacts to the public or the environment.

NEXT TOWN HALL MEETING PLANNING

We are working with local officials to set the date, time and place for the next town hall meeting, which will be held later this week. We'll provide details once they are known.

CLARIFICATION ON YESTERDAY'S ITEM

In yesterday's WIPP Update, it was incorrectly stated that negative results for urinalysis of employees indicated "contamination was not inhaled into the lungs." It is possible that a small amount of contamination was inhaled; however, the negative urinalysis indicates that no detectable contamination was passed through the blood stream and urine.