

WIPP air filters explained

By Emily Younger

Published: March 11, 2014, 5:47 pm

 (<http://krqe.com/2014/03/11/wipp-air-filters-explained/?share=twitter>)  (<http://krqe.com/2014/03/11/wipp-air-filters-explained/?share=google-plus-1>)

 (<http://krqe.com/2014/03/11/wipp-air-filters-explained/?share=facebook>)  (<http://krqe.com/2014/03/11/wipp-air-filters-explained/?share=pinterest>)



CARLSBAD, N.M. (KRQE) – We’ve heard several times that the air filters outside WIPP indicate there’s no immediate danger to the public.

But **what do those air filters look** (<http://krqe.com/2014/03/10/wipp-radiation-leak-still-a-mystery/>) like and what do they really do?

The Carlsbad Environmental Monitoring and Research Center operates air sampling units at and around the nuclear repository site.

“We actually have an upwind, onsite and downwind sampler,” said Radiation Safety Specialist James Monk.

The center, run by New Mexico State University, collects dozens of air filters every day.

“Forty-seven filters a week that we either check, collect or observe getting collected,” said Monk.

After a technician collects the filter from the specific site, he or she takes the sample back to the lab to be processed.

Once it’s at the lab, chemists analyze the filters for dangerous particles that may have escaped the underground nuclear dump and spread into the air.

The research center says on Feb. 14, **the day of the underground spill**, (<http://krqe.com/2014/02/15/possibe-radiation-leak-at-wipp/>) their air filters detected high levels of radiation.

“In the past, we’ve had to look at six to eight decimal places below zero to see activity, and right now, we’re seeing activity about two decimals below zero,” said Research Director Russell Hardy.

Hardy says the public has **nothing to worry about**. (<http://krqe.com/2014/03/05/results-from-wipp-leak-released/>)

He says even though the radiation levels are higher than they were before the leak, there’s no health hazard.

“If there is something out there, we will see it,” said Hardy.

Technicians from the research center check the air filters three times a day.

On Wednesday, they’ll start taking soil samples outside the plant.

The Department of Energy says technicians might go underground this week to find the cause of the radiation leak.