

WIPP vulnerable, recent leak shows

Guest Columns Opinion

Like 43,750 people like this. Sign Up to see what your friends like.

SHARE

Twitter 0

Facebook 8

LinkedIn 0

submit

Email this article

Print this article

By Sherry M. Keeney / President/CEO, PECOS Management Services, Inc.

PUBLISHED: Wednesday, March 12, 2014 at 12:05 am

Beginning in February 2013, the public finally received the opportunity to see that the WIPP site was in fact, subject to the same issues that a normal business has – it is vulnerable.

Is WIPP in danger of extinction? No, but operationally it is time to look at the situation and make some serious decisions to keep up with the times.

I have been involved with WIPP since the early 1990s and most recently, my company, PECOS Management Services, Inc. was the Independent Oversight

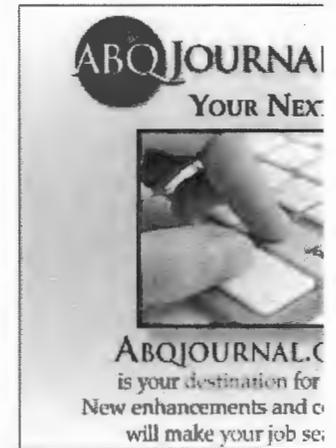
Contractor from 2005 through 2010. Through that contract, we studied the health and safety aspects of the site and the processes associated with the operations of WIPP.

As with any governmental facility, it was state-of-the-art when built, and has been maintained to



Radiological detection instruments recently were lowered into WIPP to test underground radioactivity levels. (Courtesy of U.S. Department of Energy)

ADVERTISEMENT



OPINION

What's Your C

Letters to the editor
Submit a **letter to the edi**

Local Guest Author Colu

Double Exposure Photo C

If you want to complain or

governmental standards since opening its doors. These standards are antiquated and don't serve the facility to its best interest.

The repository ventilation and air filtering and monitoring systems have been in operation for over 30 years in a very harsh environment — much harsher than most underground mines. There have been recent problems with the underground air monitoring system dating back to 2010 that indicate that age may be catching up to the infrastructure.

The reliability of the room and panel closure systems is also in question since one likely source of the releases of radioactivity into the environment is a result of a ceiling collapse in one of the filled panels that ruptured one or more waste packages.

Is this the beginning of a multitude of problems at WIPP? Hardly. It proves the point that WIPP is vulnerable and DOE needs to correct those vulnerabilities before they encapsulate any more waste.

As facilities and equipment age, maintenance and replacement costs go up. To make up for shortfalls in the annual WIPP budget, there is often the decision to defer replacement or some maintenance with the hope that those facilities, equipment or systems will still function as they should. This may be why the vehicle caught on fire in the repository.

There may also be decisions to reduce some preparatory or support work. Similarly, routine service of the HEPA filters designed to prevent releases such as the most recent one might have been cut back in either detail or frequency.

Not only is the facility expensive to operate, WIPP has the associated personnel costs.

When there are budget shortfalls, there is a tough call to decrease staff or not fill vacancies to support the operational constraints. When there is not enough money to go around, good people see the writing on the wall and move on to other jobs, often leaving without disseminating the institutional knowledge that might have helped prevent future anomalies from occurring.

Thankfully, there were the protections in place to make sure that the possible exposure didn't impact the masses. I am not disputing that there is a serious situation that needs specific, focused attention, but first and foremost, our most precious asset, the WIPP staff are safe.

WIPP, like almost every DOE site I have been involved with, has always operated under a cloud of anxiety. Not necessarily by the people in Carlsbad but by the regulatory agencies entrusted to keep WIPP safe and more prominently by the few that believe that nuclear, in any capacity, is not safe.

Up until these events, WIPP has had a safety record that many in the commercial world could only be

e-mail us at: speakup@ab

Speak Up! rules: You have words or less. Keep it clean please. Don't identify anyone and we don't need your name. *It's cheaper than therapy!*

Syndicated Cc

Amy Goodrich

Charles Krauth

Cal Thom

Dana Milbrink

Diane Dimick

Esther J. Cerny

E.J. Dionne

George V.

Jonah Gold

Leonard P.

Ruth Marc

Robert J. Sam

Ruben Nava

Victor Davis

ADVERTISEMENT

in awe of.

These recent events only show that WIPP was complacent and not as compliant as they should have been. They also show the need for a thorough independent review of WIPP both with respect to current operations and proposed future operations.

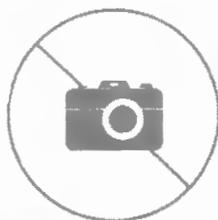
WIPP needs to be operated with care and knowledge – not fear and stigmatism.

I stand behind those who are seeking the answers to ensure that we are not faced with this dilemma again.



One listing.
Hundreds of ALE
calendars.

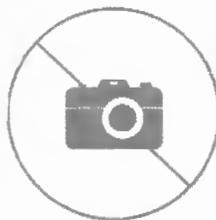
Suggested Reading:



WIPP outlines plan to investigate radiation



Union awaits info on leak at WIPP



Editorial: Base WIPP response on science,



Probe of WIPP leak may begin today

FEATURED JOBS

COMMENTS

Note: Readers can use their Facebook identity for online comments or can use Hotmail, Yahoo or AOL accounts via the "Comment using" pulldown menu. You may send a news tip or an anonymous comment directly to the reporter, [click here](#).

Feature Your Jobs: call 823-44