



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

Media Contact:
Ben Williams
WIPP Recovery Communications
(575) 234-7545

www.wipp.energy.gov

 @WIPPNews

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The science of WIPP

In recent weeks, there have been many questions about the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) and why southeastern New Mexico was selected as the location for the world's only repository for transuranic waste disposal.

Government officials and scientists chose the WIPP site through a selection process that started in the 1950s. At that time, the National Academy of Sciences conducted a nationwide search for geological formations stable enough to contain radioactive wastes for thousands of years. In 1955, after extensive study, salt deposits were recommended as a promising medium for the disposal of radioactive waste. Since then, salt formations have been one of the leading candidates for the permanent disposal of radioactive waste.

Salt deposits offer many advantages. Most salt deposits are in stable geological areas with very little earthquake activity. Salt is relatively easy to mine, and deposits do not have flowing water that could move waste to the surface. Also, rock salt heals its own fractures, which means that it will slowly move to refill mined areas. This process allows radioactive waste to be safely sealed off from the surrounding environment.

At the 2,150-foot depth of the WIPP repository, the salt will encapsulate the buried waste in the rock over a period of decades and seal the waste. The same natural barriers and self-sealing properties that kept the salt intact for millions of years will also safely isolate the waste. The area's proven stability over such a long timespan ensures that the repository will remain stable for at least the time it takes for waste to lose most of its radioactivity.



Community meetings scheduled

May 1 – The City of Carlsbad and DOE will co-host a weekly meeting featuring updates on WIPP recovery activities. The meeting is scheduled on Thursday at 5:30 p.m. Location: Carlsbad City Council Chambers, 101 N. Halagueno Street. Live streaming of the weekly meetings can be seen at <http://new.livestream.com/rrv/>.

NOTE: There will not be a WIPP Update for Sunday, April 27. The next update will be Monday, April 28.