



October 16, 2019

Mr. Ricardo Maestas
New Mexico Environment Department
Hazardous Waste Bureau
2905 Rodeo Park Drive E, Building 1
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87505

Via email to Ricardo.Maestas@state.nm.us

Comments on a proposed Class 3 modification to the Hazardous Waste Facility
Permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant - Excavation of a New Shaft and Associated
Connecting Drifts

Dear Mr. Maestas:

Nuclear Watch NM (NukeWatch) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments
on the proposed WIPP Class 3 permit modification - Excavation of a New Shaft and
Associated Connecting Drifts.

Nuclear Watch New Mexico seeks to promote safety and environmental protection
at nuclear facilities; mission diversification away from nuclear weapons programs;
greater accountability and cleanup in the nation-wide nuclear weapons complex;
and consistent U.S. leadership toward a world free of nuclear weapons.

General Comments

We strongly oppose the "WIPP Forever" plans that a new shaft would afford.
Originally billed as a replacement exhaust shaft to help WIPP recover from the 2014
exploding drum event that shut down WIPP for three years, a proposed new shaft is
now designed to increase WIPP's capacity. Federal laws, agreements with the State
of New Mexico, and the WIPP Permit all provide that WIPP has a limited mission for
up to 175,564 cubic meters of transuranic (TRU) waste and to operate for a limited
lifetime. Other repositories and improved on-site storage must be developed for
other wastes and newly generated TRU waste. These operations do not need a new
shaft in order to be completed.

This Class 3 PMR fails to mention the need for all the extra ventilation capacity. It
has been stated many times that after the New Filter Building comes online, WIPP

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will have regained its pre-2014 ventilation capacity of 425,000 cubic feet per minute (cfm) without the new shaft. The future of just using the 425,000 cfm setup must be explained. What happens? Does it take longer to reach WIPP's capacity? Please explain exactly what adding the new shaft and increasing the ventilation to 540,000 cfm really gains versus 425,000 cfm.

The Permittees must explain the reasons for the new shaft proposed location. The Permittees must explain the reasons for the new drifts' proposed locations.

This PMR must include all the planned and ongoing Permit Modification Requests, and ongoing operations that will be affected by a new shaft. NukeWatch remains concerned about the number of proposed permit modification requests (PMRs) that are waiting in the wings. These include Panel 10 (2019), Panel 11 (fall 2020), and perhaps many others.

Yet this PMR would lead one to believe that the shaft would stand alone. Where are the PMRs for the new Panels? The public deserves the whole picture. This segmented approach to modifying the WIPP permit leaves the public feeling like part of the future of WIPP is being hidden from view. The Permittees can envision complicated ventilation schemes in the underground using different fans, blocking drifts, and directing the air to different shafts, but the Permittees refuse to share their integrated plans for the future panels. Until we receive the plans for the whole future of WIPP, NMED must deny this new shaft request.

Despite the fact that the New Mexico Environment Department has not permitted the new shaft, in gross predetermination last month DOE awarded a \$75 million contract to construct the 30-foot in diameter shaft to a depth of 2,150 feet below ground surface. We respectfully request that NMED not be inclined to approve this PMR just because public tax dollars have already been spent.

We request a full National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) of the new shaft and any future panels. We demand a Supplement Analysis of the new shaft and any future panels. In addition to the environmental benefits, a NEPA action would stop the spending of irretrievable resources on an unapproved modification.

The new shaft will require a new closure plan. But what would there be to actually close? Now it seems like only a shaft, but a closure plan should include the entire facility, including any new panels. DOE/WIPP has plans to more than double the operational lifetime of the WIPP facility. The reasons must be stated in this PMR.

This new shaft PMR must be included in the 10-year WIPP permit renewal. To have parallel processes going at the same time is a huge complication.

Specific Comments

The operational advantages of the new ventilation system were touted.

From page 1 of the Class 3 PMR:

“The PVS [Permanent Ventilation System] restores the WIPP underground to its pre-2014 condition by providing significantly increased ventilation flow, unfiltered exhaust for the construction activities, and filtered exhaust for the disposal circuit.”

The PVS actually greatly enhances the pre-2014 conditions at WIPP. This wording must be changed to reflect reality.

From page 3 of the Class 3 PMR:

“...the current UVS [UG ventilation system] does not have the capability of automatically adjusting to changes in temperature, barometric pressure, and relative humidity. This inability to automatically adjust increases the susceptibility of the UVS to changes in airflow quantity. The PVS [Permanent Ventilation System] upgrades, consisting of both the NFB [New Filter Building] and S#5, will provide a technologically advanced capability to automatically adjust the intake fan and exhaust fan flow, thereby enhancing operational control of the ventilation system.

Basically this says that automatically adjusting the control will enhance the operational control. Setting the circular logic aside for a moment, when has the lack of automatic ventilation control ever been a problem? The Permittees must describe all the times that the old system endangered the UG workers.

But [A recent report from the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board](#) (DNFSB) explains the DNFSB’s calculations on the proposed new safety significant confinement ventilation system (SSCVS, estimated at nearly \$300 million). The DNFSB is concerned that the final design of the WIPP ventilation system may not adequately perform its intended safety functions due to the use of potentially inadequate performance criteria for damper closure time and unspecified design requirements for the underground safety significant continuous air monitors (CAM) and related support systems.

As far back as March 2018, the Board expressed concern “that the final design documentation for the WIPP SSCVS does not adequately address design requirements for the full integration of the underground safety significant continuous air monitoring system (CAM).”

All DNFSB concerns must be met before the new shaft PMR is approved.

Page B-7 of the redline states:

“The reinforced-concrete shaft collars extend from the surface to the top of

the underlying consolidated sediments. Each collar serves to retain adjacent unconsolidated sands and soils and to prevent surface runoff from entering the shafts. The shaft linings extend from the base of the collar to the top of the salt beds approximately 850 ft (259 m) below the surface. Grout injected behind the shaft lining or a polymeric spray coating retards water seeping into the shafts from water-bearing formations, and the liner is designed to withstand the natural water pressure associated with these formations. The shaft liners are concrete, except in the Salt Handling Shaft, where a steel shaft liner has been grouted in place. “

Please describe the advantages and disadvantages of a polymeric spray coating versus grout. What are the environmental implications of a polymeric spray coating? What was used on the other shafts? Is this the first use of this at WIPP?

For the above reasons, NukeWatch requests that NMED deny this Permit Modification Request. Should NMED approve this PMR, NukeWatch requests a hearing concerning this proposed new shaft Permit Modification Request.

Thank you for your careful consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

Scott Kovac
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