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SLO Mothers for Peace ♦ PO Box 3608 ♦ San Luis Obispo, CA 93403 ♦ <https://mothersforpeace.org>

August 10, 2020

Ricardo Maestas  
Ricardo.Maestas@state.nm.us  
Hazardous Waste Bureau  
New Mexico Environment Department  
2905 Rodeo Park Drive East, Building 1  
Santa Fe, NM 87505

Re: PUBLIC NOTICE No. 20-03 - New Shaft at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

Dear Mr. Maestas:

Luis Obispo Mothers for Peace, objects to the proposed permit modification for the construction of a new shaft and associated drifts (tunnels) into the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico. This facility has a history of leaks and accidents which have released radioactivity into the environment. An expansion of this facility would exacerbate the dangers to the public and is unacceptable.

Other concerns include the following:

- The fact sheet for the draft permit fails to inform the public that the shaft is already being dug. The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) authorized the construction of the shaft seven weeks before the draft permit was issued and long before the public hearings will be held. This action violates and disrespects the public process.
- The DOE's stated justification for the new shaft is to provide airflow, yet a permanent ventilation system is currently being built which will provide over 100% of the air that workers need in the contaminated areas. Clearly, the real purpose for the shaft is to expand capacity to more than double the disposal area. DOE needs this space because the existing, permitted panels will be filled in a few years.
- The planned expansion will allow for increased quantity and greater variety of wastes, including:
  - high-level radioactive waste from Hanford, Washington and other sites;
  - weapons-grade plutonium from the Savannah River Site in South Carolina;
  - commercial waste from West Valley, New York; and
  - 50 years or more of waste from building new nuclear weapons.
- In 1999, DOE promised the New Mexicans that WIPP would operate for 25 years and is thus required to close in 2024. The DOE now claims that it needs to keep WIPP open forever, endangering the health and safety of community members of current and future generations.

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- This is an environmental justice issue against the majority minority Hispanic, Native American, and other people of color. Two high-level radioactive Consolidated Interim Storage facilities have targeted the same local area.
- The transportation element is inherently high-risk, and contaminated shipments are expected from long distances.

It's time for NMED to support the people of New Mexico, ensure public safety, and enforce DOE's promise to close the facility in 2024. NMED must withdraw the temporary authorization, stop construction of the shaft, and deny the modification request itself.

Thank you for your careful consideration of our comments.

San Luis Obispo Mothers for Peace Board

Jane Swanson  
Linda Seeley  
Jill ZamEk  
Marty Brown  
Elaine Holder  
Molly Johnson  
Carole Hisasue  
Sherry Lewis

**From:** [Maestas, Ricardo, NMENV](#)  
**To:** [McLean, Megan, NMENV](#); [Biswell, David, NMENV](#)  
**Subject:** FW: [EXT] Re: PUBLIC NOTICE No. 20-03 - New Shaft at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant  
**Date:** Monday, August 10, 2020 2:06:13 PM  
**Attachments:** [Comments on expansion 8.10.2020.pdf](#)

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**From:** Mojo <mollypj@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, August 10, 2020 2:02 PM  
**To:** Maestas, Ricardo, NMENV <Ricardo.Maestas@state.nm.us>  
**Subject:** [EXT] Re: PUBLIC NOTICE No. 20-03 - New Shaft at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

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