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Ricardo Maestas
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:

I object to the proposed permit modification for the construction of a new shaft and associated drifts (tunnels) into the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) underground. I also object that the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) has authorized the construction of the shaft seven weeks before the draft permit was issued and long before the public hearing will be held.

To make matters worse, NMED has provided little vital information in Spanish, the fact sheet for the draft permit doesn't tell the public that the shaft is already being built, and continues to claim that the shaft is needed for air flow in the current underground repository. Allowing the Department of Energy (DOE) to start digging the shaft before required public participation is complete and before the permit has been issued, makes it clear that public process on WIPP, is neither supported by nor respected by NMED.

It is clear there is no emergency requiring NMED to issue a temporary authorization for shaft construction. In fact, nearly two years before the new shaft and drifts are finished, the New Filter Building will provide over 100% of the air that workers need in the partially contaminated underground.

The new shaft is actually for new underground waste rooms that could more than double the disposal area. DOE needs this space because the existing, permitted panels will be filled in a few years.

The new shaft is all about expanding WIPP for more waste and more kinds of waste, 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 and before, DOE promised the New Mexicans that WIPP would operate for 25 years and, as its current permit requires, close in 2024. The DOE says now it needs to keep WIPP open forever.

It's time for NMED to support the People of New Mexico and ensure DOE keeps its promise to us. NMED must withdraw the temporary authorization, stop drilling the shaft and must then deny the modification request itself.

Please stand strong for the residents of New Mexico. We already bear the psychic burden of the damage done by nuclear warfare; there is no reason for our state to bear the physical burden of nuclear storage. Expansion of the WIPP facility is a dangerous prospect. Moving nuclear waste from all over the country to New Mexico is hazardous. We all know that once the waste is here on a "temporary" basis it will

never leave. The Southeast corner of our state will become an irredeemably, dangerously polluted and un-inhabitable.

Thank you for your careful consideration of my comments.

Susan Hart
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