October 7, 1988

Mr. Alex Valdez
Office of the Governor
State Capitol Building
Santa Fe, NM 87503

Dear Mr. Valdez:

Enclosed you will find current news clippings related to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant.

Sincerely,

Robert H. Neill
Director

Three local underground bands will play in a benefit concert protesting the nuclear waste dumping site tentatively scheduled to open early next year.

Stop WIPP Underground will feature Angry Babies, Nervous and Mad Vets at El Rey Theater, Seventh and Central, on Thursday, Sept. 29. Benefit organizer Linda Kite said it is the first local benefit of its kind aimed at the underground music scene.

"I'd like to spread the word to kids who might want to get involved," Kite said. "There are a lot of smart kids in the community who are bored. I'd like to mobilize the masses and stop preaching to the converted."

Kite, a UNM student working on her master's degree in peace studies program, said the benefit is the first of a series of anti-WIPP monthly concerts at El Rey Theater. The concert is sponsored by Musicians United Against WIPP and Citizens for Alternatives to Radioactive Dumping.

WIPP stands for Waste Isolation Pilot Project, a program to store nuclear waste near Carlsbad, making New Mexico the first nuclear waste dumping site in the nation.

One of the controversies surrounding WIPP is the presence of underground water at the dump site, where the waste can seep into the ground. Activists are also concerned about New Mexico's high rate of truck accidents because about 1,000 WIPP trucks per year will travel through the state to the dump site.

If WIPP works, it will store only one percent of the existing nuclear waste in the country, Kite said. "We're talking about plutonium -- nuclear waste that's never going to go away." Kite said the WIPP issue was never put on the ballot for New Mexicans to vote on. "In total, it's going to bring maybe 500 jobs to the whole state, and 65 percent of those will be by New Mexicans," she said. "It's not going to create any new jobs, it's just going to transfer people around who are already employed."

Tickets for Stop WIPP Underground are $4 in advance, $5 at the door, and are available at Merlin's Records, Living Bookstore, the Peace Center and La Montanita Food Co-op in Nob Hill.
Viewpoint

EDITORIAL

Don't Rush WIRP Opening

Members of Congress belatedly have gotten into the question of when the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant between Hobbs and Carlsbad should open, and their conclusion is that the facility to store radioactive waste material is not ready to handle the task safely.

The Department of Energy for months has been shooting at a target date of October to bring in the first shipments of waste material for storage in the underground repository, carved from the desert's ancient salt beds. However, it apparently was the consensus last week of the Government Operations environment, energy and natural resources subcommittee that WIPP "has not adequately proved it can operate safely."

While we generally have supported the creation of the WIPP project, it has been apparent for a very long time that the DOE has not followed through on many of its promises and plans; thus it seems this pattern is carrying over to the actual precautions that should attend operation of the repository.

In short, DOE has been too hurried, or at the very least the agency's planning has not been very thorough.

Lea County residents remember that when the project was being discussed for southeastern New Mexico, government officials bid for our support in return for the economic benefits that would be forthcoming. Now that the project is nearly completed, we know of no major plant or adjunct activity that WIPP has brought to the county.

In fact, not so much as a road - through the county - has been provided by funding sought by the DOE. This would include the bypass route around Hobbs. It is not ready for the hauling by large trucks of waste material, and this in itself is a safety hazard. These portions of the route now completed were paid for with funds provided through efforts other than those of the DOE.

Only now are bids being let for improved roads leading to the site from the northcentral part of New Mexico.

Among other failings, the House committee learned that the facility is not properly ventilated. Early this year, tests proved the waste canisters for hauling were not as sound as we had been led to believe. And what seems most astonishing, the land at the WIPP site has not been officially withdrawn from its public status.

While we believe the pilot plant is a safe project for storage of low-level nuclear waste materials, we believe Congress should withhold approval of its opening until such time as all questions of safety have been answered by the DOE and widely published for the public.

Forty years of this waste have accumulated, with much of it stored on the earth's surface - resulting in no documented accidents or deaths. A little more time can be taken before placing WIPP in operation.
State reviews city relief route

Steve Stein
Record Staff Writer

Members of the State Highway Commission learned during its regular session at the Roswell Inn that the pre-construction phase of the southwest portion of the Roswell Relief Route is nearly complete.

With both Mayor William F. Brainerd and City Manager Ralph Fresquez present, Highway Department officials told the commission Friday that by November 1989 the $11.9 million project could go to bid. The design of the 7.5-mile Southwest Roswell Relief Route, which will extend from U.S. 70/380 north to the junction at U.S. 285, is complete.

Appraisals along the northwest route will begin this November and by July 1989 the department hopes to have all property owners signed to an agreement.

Construction bids on the northwest route could be requested by November 1990, Ringer said.

The Legislature and Highway Department have to date appropriated a combined $4.65 million for the project, which is estimated to cover the costs of design and right-of-way acquisition along the entire 15-mile route.

The Highway Department, has budgeted about $13 million for the project through fiscal year 1991-92, leaving about $13 million of the project unfunded.

State and local officials are hoping the entire project, or most of the project, will be funded by the Department of Energy (DOE) through a $190 million allocation for bypasses around six New Mexico cities on the truck route, which includes Roswell, the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in Carlsbad.

Fresquez told the Daily Record that since the bypass project has been in the planning phase for the past 10 years he is eager to see the construction phase get underway.

He said if the DOE funds are released the project will most likely be completed much more quickly, but he is also aware that WIPP is beginning to get negative publicity nationwide.

The state highway department is being appraised, according to Robert G. Ringer, director of the department’s design division.

The design phase of the Northwest Roswell Relief Route, which extends from U.S. 70/380 north to the junction at U.S. 285, is also complete.

The construction cost estimate for this 7.5-mile project is $14.2 million, bringing the total cost estimate for the 15-mile relief route to $201 million.

The highway department officials agreed.

If passed, the bill would withdraw the land around the WIPP site from public use and almost guarantee that the DOE would release the $190 million bypass money, according to Ronald Forte, chief of the planning bureau for the Highway Department.

The New Mexico congressional delegation is pushing the bill but is receiving stiff opposition from environmental groups who are concerned radioactive waste will seep through the salt beds at the WIPP site, Forte said.

Forte said he is hopeful the complex bill will pass this session, before the November general election, rather than going before the next session of Congress.

The DOE has stated officially that it will not allow non-experimental shipments of radioactive waste to WIPP unless the Land Withdrawal Bill passes, Forte said.

The bill may determine the future status of WIPP and the Roswell Relief Route, information not lost on anti-WIPP groups, Highway Department officials agreed.

Linda Finley, an aide for U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., who is monitoring the progress of the bill, said it could not be reached for comment.

In other business Friday morning, the commission, which held a two-day session in Roswell Thursday and Friday, discussed adopting a manual on uniform traffic devices, the status of several state roads and a request to complete a school bus access road at Naschitti in northern New Mexico.

State Sen. John Pinto, D-San Juan, McKinley, discussed the Naschitti request with the commission.

Clyde Allensworth, chairman of the Chaves County Commission, attended the meeting Friday, as did Lee Goodpasture, county commissioner, and several members from the staff of both the city and county.

Dewey Lonsberry, state Highway and Transportation secretary, attended both sessions, as did most chiefs of the various highway departments.

Wille Ortiz of Santa Fe is chairman of the commission.

Besides Ortiz, members of the commission are co-chairman — J.V. Curtis of Clovis; secretary — Emerinda De Brise of Socorro; and members Mary Jean Christensen of Gallup, Donald Relf of Clayton and Jack Westman of Albuquerque.
WIPP Retains Workers Despite No Land Bill

Permanent workers at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant should experience no anxiety over news that the land withdrawal bill has failed, according to Jack Tillman, project director for the Department of Energy. Failure of the New Mexico congressional delegation to reach agreement and place a land withdrawal bill on the floor of either chamber of Congress did not spell closure of the WIPP project, which retains about 500 permanent employees.

But as many as 70 temporary employees, one report said 87, were terminated late last week, Tillman said. "Those people would have gone away anyway," Tillman said, "they were not expected to be permanent."

Westinghouse Electric Corp. spokesman Tarek Kries said today some temporary employees are being routed into the permanent status. "Westinghouse's main goal is to provide employment security here," he said.

Tillman said the timing of the congressional announcement of the land withdrawal bill's failure affected the timing of the layoffs, but that all employees knew their work was temporary and were expecting their terminations.

"In the near term, we don't expect any reduction in our employment level," Tillman said, noting a significant amount of work yet to be done to make WIPP ready to accept radioactive materials once a land withdrawal bill is passed. That is not likely to happen until late spring or summer at the earliest, he said, "based on the political process."

Tillman said, "I've maintained all along that the land withdrawal act is independent of us declaring we are operationally ready." He said safety and experimental work must be continued and completed before the site is ready to accept transuranic shipments.

Carlsbad Mayor Bob Forrest said today, "I'm disappointed that they couldn't get the land withdrawal bill passed, but I guarantee you, we're going to get that thing open."

Tillman acknowledged that, further down the line, the DOE will be assessing its activity level and examining employment needs. But any changes are not expected for several months.

-CURRENT-NEWS, Carlsbad, N.M., Wednesday, October 5, 1994
Anti-WIPP Group Backs Richardson Stance

Continued from A1

Richardson’s version of the land withdrawal bill “has strong support in Congress and is the product of considerable public input. Rep. Richardson has bargained in good faith with the other members of the delegation in his efforts to include provisions that are responsible and scientifically justified,” Stu Nakurka, a spokesman for Richardson, said Monday that Richardson supports the land withdrawal for the WIPP facility but believes no radioactive waste should be buried at the site until Environmental Protection Agency standards for permanent disposal are met.
Withdrawal Bill Dies In Committee

Richardson Blamed

By the Associated Press
With the Current-Argus

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two members of New Mexico's congressional delegation sharply criticized Rep. Bill Richardson, D-N.M., for stalling a bill that would withdraw land for a nuclear waste repository near Carlsbad, N.M.

Members of the New Mexico delegation said Monday there wasn't enough time left in the congressional session to get the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant land bill through the Senate and House.

Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., said today, "We were within an eyelash last Friday of getting legislation accomplished."

"Four of the members, Domenici, Bingaman, Lujan and Skeen had reached an agreement," Domenici told the Carlsbad Current-Argus, "one did not, and that's the story. That one is Bill Richardson."

Department of Energy officials had announced last month that shipments of waste to the WIPP site would be delayed until early 1990, voting other problems in addition to the stalled land withdrawal bill included obtaining NRC certification of the TRUFACT container, a safety analysis report and a plan of experiments.

The land withdrawal bill would remove from public domain some 10,240 acres near Carlsbad for WIPP.

The plant would be the nation's first radioactive waste dump, burying contaminated wastes from the nation's defense programs in rooms excavated from salt beds more than 2,100 feet below the surface.

"New Mexico now is much more at risk than we were with all of the protections that were going to be built into this withdrawal bill regarding health, safety and welfare of New Mexicans, and that's without taking into account the roadway projects that were going to be authorized," Domenici said.

Included in the bill were provisions directing the DOE to study brine seepage in the salt beds, authorizing $200 million to complete the WIPP road system in New Mexico, requiring NRC certification of the waste containers, providing $30 million over five years to compensate New Mexico for lost mineral royalties at the site and requiring the DOE to provide emergency response training for state and local officials along the route.

Rep. Joe Skeen, a Republican, also said other members of the delegation supported the bill but Richardson "while publicly offering his support for WIPP," did everything possible to slow the legislative process.

"One dissenting member managed to delay the process sufficiently so that now there are less than 10 legislative days left in the 100th Congress, not nearly enough time to address such an important issue as WIPP and the future of nuclear waste policy in this country," Skeen said Monday.

He said the land withdrawal measure will die when the Congress adjourns late this month, but that he will reintroduce it in January.

"This bill will not go away. WIPP will not go away. Nuclear waste currently being stored above ground will not go away," he said, "and neither will my support for this project."

Richardson could not be reached for comment Monday night, but a spokesman, Jim Nagurka, said Richardson sent a letter to New Mexico's four other congressional delegation members Monday urging them to have Congress consider the withdrawal bill this session.

"Considering the short time left in this Congress, and the Senate bill is ready for floor action while the House bill hasn't, our only means of ensuring a WIPP bill this

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Land Withdrawal Bill Dies In Committee

Continued from page 1

year is to have the Senate act as soon as possible," Richardson said in the letter. "The (Senate) bill is a thoughtful environmentally sensitive approach to a difficult issue and I urge you to bring it to the Senate floor."

Richardson said if the bill passed the Senate he would seek to expedite its consideration by the House.

But Ringmann, Domenici said Skeen, in separate statements, said there is not enough time left in the session to work out remaining differences.

Domenici said today, "It's obvious to me that unless it's all right (Richardson's) way you aren't going to get a bill."

"The only way to pass a bill at this stage is for the delegation to present a united front," Ringmann said.

Domenici pointed out WIPP is not dead, but the land withdrawal bill which has been two-and-a-half years in the making is.

Rich Marquez, a spokesman for the Department of Energy's Albuquerque operations office, said the agency was disappointed in the failure to pass the bill.

Richardson supports the land withdrawal, but believes no waste should be buried in WIPP until it meets certain Environmental Protection Agency standards, Nagurka said.

Other delegation members have agreed the repository could open but that it would not store more than 3 percent of its capacity until it demonstrated it could meet the EPA standards in 1998 or remove the waste it had buried up to that time.

New Mexico's Environmental Evaluation Group, a scientific oversight group, last week offered a compromise formula that would allow DOE to fill the site to 1 percent of capacity in the first phase and, if that amount met EPA standards, fill it to 3 percent.

Richardson said Monday he could not support the ESG compromise.

Ringmann warned that DOE could open WIPP by administrative action, such action would allow waste to be stored "without any of the safety provisions contained in the bill and without any compensation to state and local governments."

Ringmann said he is opposed to such administrative action and would fight it. Nagurka said Richardson also would oppose such action.

"We think that decision would be a terrible mistake," Nagurka said. "We certainly hope the department acts against it, and hope the three Republicans in the delegation would act against it.

"We can reverse the decision by the department or state, and save the repository for the storage of low- and intermediate-level transuranic nuclear waste," he said.

Richardson pointed out DOE's strategy for the next session before making a decision.

"There's plenty for DOE to do between now and the end of the year," he said. "We have identified several major issues (to be addressed) before opening WIPP in any event."

Marquez said those issues include certification of containers to haul waste to WIPP, developing an experimental test plan for waste and resolving issues pinpointed in a final safety analysis report.

Skeen introduced the land withdrawal bill in the House of Representatives in May 1987, and Rep. Manuel Lujan, R-N.M., and Domenici and Ringmann co-sponsored it in their respective chambers.

"I have maintained all along that WIPP is an experimental facility for the storage of low- and intermediate-level transuranic nuclear waste," Skeen said. "We need this facility to open not only as place to safely store these waste more than 2,000 feet below ground, but also as a research and development facility for storing and disposing of nuclear materials."

Skeen said Richardson suggested that if the New Mexico delegation could not reach a consensus on WIPP legislation it could take the fight to the floor.

He said the rest of the delegation has been more than willing to compromise and has amended the legislation to strengthen its health and safety provisions.

"We have eliminated language in the legislation which would have allowed testing on high-level waste at the WIPP site. We have agreed that no remote-handled stainless steel containers weighing 9,000 pounds or more could be stored at WIPP before those standards are met from 15 percent to 3 percent," he said.

Skeen said the government still intends to open WIPP because the amount of nuclear waste being stored above ground around the nation "is reaching epidemic proportions."

Domenici said it was difficult to predict what will happen now that the bill is dead for the session.

"Clearly there are many within Congress whose patience is growing thin, probably there are many within DOE whose patience is growing thin," he said. "The overwhelming scientific evidence is that it can be done safely."

WIPP originally was to open this month, but that was delayed pending the land withdrawal bill, Nuclear Regulatory Commission certification of containers to haul waste to WIPP and resolution of concern raised by the safety analysts.

The waste containers, called TRU-Pack 2, are undergoing tests at Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque.
Environmentalists Cheer Death of WIPP Bill

By David Staats

SANTA FE — Environmentalists on Tuesday cheered the death of a bill to open the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant as evidence mounted that WIPP's opening will be delayed well into 1990.

Although the U.S. Department of Energy has said it may try to open WIPP anyway, such an action is unlikely, one environmentalist said. Opening WIPP without congressional approval is also opposed by the U.S. Department of the Interior, which owns much of WIPP's land.

Members of New Mexico's congressional delegation on Monday declared the WIPP bill dead for this session after Rep. Bill Richardson, D-N.M., refused to accept two conditions of the bill that environmentalists oppose. Congress plans to adjourn in mid-October for the fall campaign, and time was running out.

"Rep. Richardson has proven to be the only member of the New Mexico delegation to exercise conscience and responsibility on behalf of all New Mexicans," said a news release from Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, a Santa Fe group.

"I'm disappointed in him," countered Carlsbad Mayor Robert Forrest, a WIPP booster. "I can't believe one person could stand in the way like that."

WIPP, 15 miles southeast of Carlsbad, is intended to become the nation's first permanent repository for nuclear waste. It would store mid-level waste from 10 federal weapons-making plants in a salt bed 2,150 feet underground.

The bill would have transferred, or "withdrew", the Interior-controlled land at WIPP to the Energy Department. The two departments now have an agreement that allowed WIPP to be built, but bars WIPP from receiving any nuclear waste. That agreement expires in 1991.

"We do not support an administrative withdrawal," said spokesman Lee Keeling of the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management office in Santa Fe. The Interior Department opposes storing any hazardous materials at WIPP before Congress approves, Keeling said.

Don Hancock, director of the nuclear safety project for the Southwest Research and Information Center in Albuquerque, said an administrative transfer would be illegal and would face a certain court challenge. Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., raised the possibility of an administrative transfer that would have New Mexico without the funding and numerous environmental safeguards added to the WIPP bill. Those include stopped-up state oversight, a ban on high-level waste, $200 million for new WIPP shipping roads and bypasses and $50 million to compensate New Mexico for lost royalties.

"All those are now gone," Domenici said Monday.

"That's not true," Hancock said Tuesday. "If WIPP is going to open, Congress is going to have to pass a law. A lot of the safeguards affect more than New Mexico, and there's a lot of constituency in Congress for them... The public health aspects might be in trouble, but I think the $200 million is going to make it, and I think even the highway stuff is going to make it."

Another land-transfer bill is expected to be introduced after the next session of Congress begins in January.

DOE spokes­woman Chris Sankey to Washington said the department hopes Congress will approve it quickly. With the bill and the cleaning up of some technical problems still besetting WIPP, the repository could open by March, she said.

Hancock predicted slower going. "If anybody thinks Congress is going to pass a land-withdrawal bill before January or February, they're crazy," he said.

Richardson wasn't the only opponent of this year's bill. Key legislators on the House Energy Committee also opposed it. The General Accounting Office, in testimony Sept. 13 to a House committee, called the bill "premature" until DOE determines that WIPP can meet federal environmental standards for nuclear repositories. DOE hadn't planned to do that until about 1993.

The two conditions Richardson insisted were a prohibition on any waste shipments until DOE meets the standards, and a prohibition on shipments from Los Alamos National Laboratory until a bypassed is built around Santa Fe. Without the bypass, the Los Alamos waste would go down busy St. Francis Pete.

One technical problem delaying WIPP is the lack of Nuclear Regulatory Commission approval for the shipping cask that will be used to haul waste. The cask is still being tested, and some tests performed last summer probably will be repeated. Sankey said the cask could win approval by the end of the year, but Hancock said it probably couldn't be used before mid-1990 at the earliest.

"I see no likelihood that waste will be brought to WIPP for nine months to a year under the best circumstances for DOE," he said.
Richardson sees good in WIPP-bill delay

By PETER EICHAEDT
The New Mexican Staff

Rep. Bill Richardson, D-N.M., said he is not to blame for the likely death in this congressional session of a WIPP-related bill that would have meant $250 million for New Mexico road construction and other projects.

But some good will come from the delay in approving legislation to lay groundwork for the opening of the Waste Isolation Pilot Project near Carlsbad, Richardson said.

The U.S. Department of Energy, he said, "should now get their act together and satisfy all the safety conditions."

"This might induce them to be more careful and more comprehensive."

The bill in question would have transferred 10,000 acres at the WIPP site from the Bureau of Land Management to the Energy Department.

It also contained $200 million for bypass construction and road improvements in the state, and $50 million for other related projects.

The measure seems unlikely to pass during this congressional session, and some members of the New Mexico delegation blame Richardson.

But Richardson was praised Tuesday by a Santa Fe group, Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, because the bill's demise means WIPP's opening will be delayed well into next year.

The group said in a news release that "Richardson has proven to be the only member of the New Mexico delegation to exercise conscience and responsibility on behalf of all New Mexicans."

Richardson said Tuesday that he was willing to compromise his position on the legislation, but the rest of the state's congressional delegation refused to deal.

Negotiations on a possible compromise broke off Monday, he said.

"The Republicans on the delegation want to blame me," Richardson said. "A lot of people around the country had a lot of concerns about it."

"I was right in the middle."

Richardson said he expects the bill to be reintroduced next year.
It's still a shame that one man, catering to the wishes of the ignorant, can do so much damage in this republic of ours. Maybe it's a greater shame that so many choose to remain ignorant.

Finally, the upside of the story is that WIPP would not have "opened" even if a land withdrawal bill had passed this session. The Department of Energy has yet to compile a safety analysis report, finalize a five-year plan of experiments, and obtain Nuclear Regulatory Commission certification of the TRUFACT containers.

Don't be misled by the news. WIPP is not dead — only this session's version of a bill which would have contributed tons of money to state and local coffers in exchange for 10,240 acres of desert.

Be happy today.
Delegation Buries WIPP Bill for Session

By Paul R. Wieck
OF THE JOURNAL'S
WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — The WIPP bill was declared dead for this session Monday by four members of the New Mexico delegation after the fifth member, Rep. Bill Richardson, D-N.M., called off any further talks to resolve differences he has with his colleagues on several points in the bill.

The land withdrawal bill would have transferred land around the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant site near Carlsbad from the Bureau of Land Management to the Department of Energy. The breakdown in the delegation's WIPP talks raises the possibility of administrative action by DOE to take over the 10,240-acre WIPP.

If that happens, about $250 million in funding and various safeguards in the WIPP bill could be lost.

"The WIPP legislation is dead for this year," Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., said Monday. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., echoed his view, saying, "absent an agreement of all members of the delegation, I don't think there's any way we can get all the players to stand back and let us enact something." Although he called off the talks, Richardson said he supports passage of a bill.

"The WIPP legislation is dead for this year," Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., said Monday. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., echoed his view, saying, "absent an agreement of all members of the delegation, I don't think there's any way we can get all the players to stand back and let us enact something." Although he called off the talks, Richardson said he supports passage of a bill.

Richardson said that if a Senate bill sponsored by Bingaman and Domenici passes, he'll try to get it to the House floor, where he said he'll try to amend it. Bingaman dismissed Richardson's scenario, saying "at this stage, I don't think there's time to amend the bill and then convene a conference to try to settle our differences. The only way to pass a bill at this stage is for the delegation to present a united front." Richardson said that if a Senate bill sponsored by Bingaman and Domenici passes, he'll try to get it to the House floor, where he said he'll try to amend it. Bingaman dismissed Richardson's scenario, saying "at this stage, I don't think there's time to amend the bill and then convene a conference to try to settle our differences. The only way to pass a bill at this stage is for the delegation to present a united front."

There were two areas of disagreement that Richardson and the other four members of the delegation were unable to resolve.

Last week, New Mexico's Environmental Evaluation Group, a scientific oversight group, outlined a compromise to resolve the differences over whether DOE should be allowed to put any transuranic...

Continued...
Lawmakers Bury WIPP Bill for '88

Continued from page 1

waste in the WIPP site on an experimental basis without meeting the Environmental Protection Agency's standards for both temporary and permanent disposal of waste.

DOE wants to fill WIPP up to 15 percent of capacity while meeting only temporary standards for experimentation, but the majority of the delegation — Bingaman, Domenici, and Republican Reps. Manuel Lujan and Joe Skeen — agreed DOE should be limited to 10 percent. EEG suggested a new formula under which DOE would fill the site to 1 percent in the first phase and, if that amount met EPA standards, fill it to 3 percent.

On Monday, Richardson, who has insisted that both the temporary and permanent disposal standards be met before any waste is shipped to WIPP for experimental purposes, said he can't support the EEG compromise.

He also objects to a provision in the Senate bill that delays for three years any shipments of transuranic waste from Los Alamos National Laboratory to the WIPP site to give the state time to build the new Los Alamos-Santa Fe road and bypass, which would be partially funded by money provided in the WIPP bill.

"I'm saying the bill must say 'No shipments down St. Francis Road' until the bypass is built," Richardson said Monday.

Domenici warned that the failure of the delegation to reach agreement puts in jeopardy the safeguards and funding contained in the WIPP bills in both the Senate and House.

These include the ban on storage of high-level waste at the site; limits placed on experiments; the three-year delay in shipping waste out of Los Alamos National Laboratory; requirements that the state's scientific oversight group review and approve safety measures; the condition that waste cannot be shipped to WIPP until the final safety analysis review is completed, as well as $200 million in road funds and $50 million to compensate New Mexico for lost royalties.

"All of these are now gone," Domenici said.

Bingaman and Domenici were able to keep these items in the bill reported out of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, but they ran into opposition from committee chairman J. Bennett Johnston, D-La. Both senators have indicated they fear they'll run into stiffer opposition next year.

Richardson's letter to his colleagues was a disappointment to other members of the delegation, but Domenici said, as Domenici put it, "within an eyelash" of reaching an agreement on the bill to turn the land for WIPP over to DOE.

"I'm deeply disappointed and frustrated that the WIPP land withdrawal bill will not proceed in the 100th Congress," Skeen said Monday.

Skeen introduced the original WIPP withdrawal bill.

Late Monday, Jeff Sherwood, a DOE spokesman, said his agency had no comment on breakup of the delegation's talks on the WIPP bill or the possibility DOE will take the site by administrative action.

DOE took the site administratively to build WIPP, but such withdrawals aren't permanent. DOE would prefer a permanent withdrawal.

Rich Marques, spokesman for DOE's Albuquerque Operations Office, said administrative transfer of the WIPP site remains an option. But technical issues continue to delay WIPP's opening, so department officials may decide they can wait for land withdrawal until Congress reconvenes in January.

"There is ample work for DOE to do between now and the beginning of the next session," Marques said. The department must still complete certification of the DUPIC-31 container for transporting waste to the site, receive approval of the experimental plan for placing wastes underground and complete the site's safety analysis.

No decision will be made to seek administrative withdrawal of the land until DOE officials here and in Washington have had a chance to consult with the New Mexico congressional delegation, he added.

Earlier this year, Acting Assistant Secretary of Energy for Defense Troy Wade told a congressional committee that DOE would have to look at taking the WIPP site by administrative action if Congress didn't act on a bill this year.

Bingaman said he is opposed to an administrative withdrawal and Domenici said he hopes DOE won't attempt it, but added, "I'm not terribly optimistic today."

Journal staff writer Byron Space contributed to this report.

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Regulators Still Mulling WIPP Cask Questions

By David Staats

SANTA FE — Federal regulators have made no decision about the adequacy of the cask that will haul nuclear waste to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, a Nuclear Regulatory Commission official said.

But an environmentalist who sat in on a meeting this week between the commission and the U.S. Department of Energy said DOE’s tests "did not go well."

Chappell declined to say whether the TRUPACT passed or failed commission requirements. "We don’t come to a conclusion until we receive an application and review it," he said. The Energy Department won’t submit an application until all its tests are finished, but has consulted with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission during the testing process.

However, Caroline Petti, a Washington lobbyist for the Southwest Research and Information Center, said DOE is considering rerunning the series of drop, puncture and fire tests performed on the first TRUPACT in Albuquerque during the summer.

Chappell declined to say whether the TRUPACT passed or failed commission requirements. "We don’t come to a conclusion until we receive an application and review it," he said. The Energy Department won’t submit an application until all its tests are finished, but has consulted with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission during the testing process.

Previously, DOE officials have said the tests went well. New media were allowed to witness some of the tests, which involved dropping the 10-foot-tall cylindrical cask on a flat surface and a spike from different angles and lighting a fire around it. When all the tests were done, the cask was checked for leakage.

The commission must certify the TRUPACT before DOE can begin haul ing nuclear waste to WIPP.
DOE official says TRUPACT tests will be run again

BY TONY DAVIS
Associated Press

The testing of TRUPACT II, the controversial nuclear waste shipping container, is due for a restart, a Department of Energy official says.

"The innermost seal leaked, but the outermost seal was good. The first seal was not intended to be a containment barrier, anyway," said DOE official James Tollison, spokesman for the Department of Energy.

"I'm not a press person, but it sounds like more than minor design changes are needed," said Carol Peter, Washington, D.C., lobbyist for the Southwest Research and Information Center, a consumers' group that opposes WIPP.

When open, WIPP will be the first nuclear waste dump in the world. The containers are supposed to be strong enough to shield the public against any radioactive leaks, should WIPP's waste hauling trucks get in an accident.

The leak was through one of the two rubber seals on the innermost of the cask's two crucial stainless steel-walled barriers.

Authorities from DOE and its private contractors blamed the leak on dust from concrete and fiberglass tubing they had placed inside the container's super-hauling drums for testing.

Those materials won't be beside the drums when the containers actually ship, but DOE plans to install dust baffles on the container's stainless steel leaks.

The rerun of testing is for a minor design change aimed at preventing future leaks, said Tollison.

"We have a few, very minor problems," said Tollison. The problem we had was something very easily understood and very easily correctible.

"This is an excellent package, we are almost there." But outside observers are divided over the significance of the testing rerun:

"It's more than minor, obviously, if you have to go back and run the tests over. You go back to square one," said Robert Nell, director of the New Mexico Environmental Evaluation Group, a state watchdog agency that oversees WIPP.

"They're not starting from scratch, it's only a minor design change," said Ross Chappell of the nuclear commission of Rockville, Md.

"The innermost seal leaked, but the outermost seal was good. The first seal was not intended to be a containment barrier, anyway."
WIPP Site Public Tour Set Oct. 22

The U.S. Department of Energy will hold another public tour of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant near Carlsbad on Oct. 22, a spokesman said.

Nearly 1,500 visitors attended the last two WIPP community days held in August, said Cathy Mikel, staff assistant for public information programs for Westinghouse, which is the management and operating contractor for WIPP.

The tour will include presentations by WIPP officials on transportation and storage and tours of the waste-handling building and an underground walking tour.

“We feel it will be another full tour. We registered about 900 each day the last time,” she said, referring to the previous community days. No other community days are scheduled after this date.

She said people who are interested in visiting the WIPP site can sign up either by filling out a registration form that will be in some newspapers around the state, or by calling 885-8883, ext. 121.

The last day to register for the tour is Oct. 14.

The DOE built WIPP in a salt bed 2,150 feet underground to hold radioactive waste from federal weapons-making plants. It will be the nation’s first permanent underground repository for nuclear waste. Most of the waste will be trucked to WIPP and stored in 55-gallon drums.
N-waste cask flunks one test, but isn’t really ‘a failure,’ either

But TRUPACT II pass or fail its first round of tests?
Neither one, said a U.S. Department of Energy official.
The testing included a 1,900-degree fire, three 30-foot-drop tests and six 40-inch drops onto a steel spike.
The double-walled container was intact after the 10 tests ended. The outer steel liner had no leaks. DOE officials say that means no radioactivity would leak out in a real-world accident.
But TRUPACT also had an air leak on the container’s innermost liner that exceeded Nuclear Regulatory Commission standards for leakage.
"You don’t pass unless you have all containment vessels leak-tight, and one was not," said Jim Tollison, DOE’s manager of waste transportation, in Albuquerque. "So you couldn’t say it passed.
"But you couldn’t say it was a failure, either. We were awfully close to passing the test. "Let’s say that in one drop test, we couldn’t hold pressure, we went in there and looked at it and found extensive damage in the seal area. That questions the whole design concept, and you’ve got to go back and change it. That’s what I call failure."
DOE’s program is more intensive than the Nuclear Regulatory Commission requirement of one test of each kind.
But Robert Neill of the watchdog agency the New Mexico Environmental Evaluation Group took a dim view of Tollison’s statement.
"You don’t want to get carried away in semantics, but if it failed to pass, it must have failed," said Neill. "If I were a student and a teacher said you didn’t pass or fail a test, I don’t think I’d know what it meant."
The decision on whether the container eventually passes or fails the test is in the commission’s hands.
For now, commission officials aren’t saying much.
"Whether it passes is something we determine in the course of review," said commission official Ross Chappell of Rockville, Md. "We don’t determine that in meetings on the basis of verbal discussions. We need test reports."
WASHINGTON — Legislation needed to open the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant near Carlsbad today appeared doomed, as sources indicated the New Mexico congressional delegation has failed to develop a compromise bill.

The scuttling of the legislation, which would have given the U.S. Department of Energy permanent ownership of the land around WIPP, leaves the future of the facility highly uncertain and means that the opening of the plant — already delayed until sometime next year — could be delayed still further.
An Update On Santa Fe Education Project

From My Viewpoint

Ned Cantwell

Last week the newspaper floated, in the editorial space adjoining, the idea of compiling a special informational supplement to run in the Santa Fe Reporter which has been the vehicle used for paid anti-WIPP tabloids sponsored by northern organizations against the project.

Our intent would be to analyze the Carlsbad position.

An update on that idea: There has been a general showing of support, as much as can be expected when one considers the vagueness of the idea, i.e., it's difficult to sponsor or underwrite an informational supplement without first ascertaining more specifically the information therein.

Among those who think the education of Santa Fe, rather than confrontation with Santa Fe, is a good idea are KCCC Radio which pledged funds and support, the Department of Development, and various persons at both the Department of Energy and Westinghouse, the latter speaking as individuals, not for their organization. Congressman Joe Skeen has telephoned his support and offered to participate.

The Chamber of Commerce is considering the idea, and we hope that important voice eventually comes aboard. We would also like the support of other organizations in town, such as labor unions and civic clubs. As we progress, and it appears we will, we will center all concern with more specific information as to the contents.

To quickly address the issue raised in a letter to the editor by C. E. Crummet: "I am not an alarmist, but I believe when the Carlsbad Current-Argus presumes to speak for all of Carlsbad, they should at least be sure that the residents of Carlsbad are informed first. Until that happens, please exclude this household (and I am sure there are many others) from your distribution."

That is a most excellent point and we thank Mr. Crummet for giving us the opportunity to clarify it. It is the responsibility of the Carlsbad Current-Argus to adopt editorial positions on local issues, and the responsibility of the readership to say "yes, that's right," or, "no you're crazy."

The Current-Argus has no right to take its positions elsewhere in the state and represent them as the opinions of its readership of others in town. We will not be that presumption.

The newspaper supplement we envision will not be a product of the Current-Argus, but of those who put their names to it. We will take special care to point out that we are not speaking for the entire community, and that there are persons in Carlsbad who have objections.

Well, what is the purpose of this project? Most of all, our intent would be to clear up what we see as basic misconceptions of what WIPP is all about.

- When you read in the northern press that a Santa Fe businessman says he does not think it is time to let St. Francis Drive "glow in the dark," Santa Fe readers accept that contention as the truth and, by logical extension, have to believe that the rubes in Carlsbad are stupid that they don't care if our main street "glow in the dark."

- When you see the posters hanging all over Santa Fe, posters which portray three ghostly decayed human beings with this message — "Don't Let Radiation Ruin Your Vacation. Call Your Congressman. Stop WIPP!" — you know we are dealing with massed uses of radiation, but massive doses of ridiculous propaganda.

- When a candidate for the State Corporation Commission, Louis Gallegos of Santa Fe, tells a Carlsbad reporter — with a straight face, we mean — that he is concerned about transportation of WIPP waste, that "the spill would wipe the town (Roswell) out," you know he is illusory of the thinking going on throughout Santa Fe.

Our intent will not be to criticize Santa Fe for raising questions. In fact, we have asked Hope Aldrich, the publisher of the Santa Fe Reporter, to compile a list of questions and issues of concern to her readers so that we may ask the proper authorities to answer them.

Have a nice day.
Stop the poison
Is it because New Mexico is the birthplace of the atomic bomb that our state was chosen to bury the nation’s nuclear bomb waste?

As yet, no permanent nuclear waste burial place exists. WIPP is the first of its kind. The Department of Energy has already dug tunnels 2,150 feet into the salt beds. But no shipments can arrive until the land there is withdrawn from public use by Congress. Called the Land Withdrawal Bill, this legislation gives away far more land than is needed to handle existing bomb waste.

The present excavation uses one square mile, while the bill allows 16 square miles to be developed. In this way, Congress guarantees that the production of nuclear bombs will never end, by providing a place to dump future wastes.

Letters are going to House and Senate members, telling them to vote against the Land Withdrawal Bill. Write your congressmen about the bill now. Let them know that you, too, refuse to allow the Earth to be poisoned — because you value your life and cherish your children’s future.

Silvi Solomon
Santa Fe

Energy Dept. Announces Registration For Oct. 22 Public Tour of WIPP Site

The U.S. Department of Energy will hold another public tour of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant near Carlsbad on Oct. 22, a spokesman said.

Nearly 1,500 visitors attended the last two WIPP community days held in August, said Cathy Mikel, staff assistant for public information programs for Westinghouse, which is the management and operating contractor for WIPP.

The tour will include presentations by WIPP officials on transportation and storage and tours of the waste-handling building and an underground walking tour.

“We feel it will be another full tour. We registered about 900 each day the last time,” she said, referring to the previous community days. “It is open for anyone who wants to come,” Mikel said, adding that no other community days are scheduled after this date.

“We couldn’t fill all the requests the first time around. We’ve had additional interest since the first community days,” Mikel said of the decision to hold a third public tour.

She said people who are interested in visiting the WIPP site can sign up either by filling out a registration form that will be in some newspapers around the state, or by calling 885-8883, ext. 121.

The last day to register for the tour is Oct. 14. Mikel suggested that people not wear open-toed or athletic shoes. Women shouldn’t wear dresses, but long pants and overcoats aren’t advised because the temperature underground is about 82 degrees.

The DOE built WIPP in a salt bed 2,150 feet underground to hold radioactive waste from federal weapons-making plants. It will be the nation’s first permanent underground repository for nuclear waste. Most of the waste will be trucked to WIPP and stored in 55-gal drums.
Four U.S. senators, all from outside New Mexico, have written a letter criticizing a bill that would allow the opening of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant near Carlsbad.

Their letter to Senate Energy Committee Chairman J. Bennett Johnston, D-La., speaks against a provision allowing more than 20,000 drums, or 3 percent of WIPP's total load of nuclear waste, to arrive at the dump before it meets U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards.

"EPA standards are the only independent check on the adequacy of the facility," said the letter. "In light of the potential safety problems at WIPP, we believe it is only prudent that DOE be required to demonstrate compliance with EPA standards before any wastes goes into the facility."

Signers were Sens. Robert Stafford, R-Vt., chairman of the Senate Environment Committee; Max Baucus, D-Mont., Bob Graham, D-Fla. and Harry Reid, D-Nev.
Third WIPP Tour Set

The U.S. Department of Energy is inviting citizens from throughout New Mexico to tour the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant near Carlsbad on Oct. 22.

More than 1,400 visitors attended the last two WIPP community days held in August. About 300 people are expected to visit on Oct. 22.

"The Community Day program was such a success, we had trouble accommodating everyone who wanted to tour the WIPP site, so we are hosting this third open house," says Westinghouse General Manager Bill Moffitt.

The tour will include overviews, presentations on WIPP operations, environmental programs and transportation as well as tours of the surface and underground facilities.

Registration forms will be available in Sunday (Oct. 2) newspapers in Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Carlsbad, Artesia, Roswell and Hobbs. Forms are also available through WIPP by calling 885-8883, extension 12.

First WIPP Shipping Target Date Passes

By Curtis C. Wynn

Managing Editor

Saturday won't happen the way it was planned, but few are surprised at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant near Carlsbad.

Original goals set by the U.S. Department of Energy would have seen shipments of nuclear waste to the WIPP site beginning this weekend.

Officials of DOE announced over a month ago that the October 1989 deadline would be missed with early 1990 becoming a hope for target. No specific target date has been set.

Among delay problems are the stalled land withdrawal legislation to remove 15,840 acres of land from public use and TRUFLUX, testing for Nuclear Regulatory Commission certification. The contingency plan is currently being worked on.

Even if the Senate bill being pushed by Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., and Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., were to pass both Houses of Congress before the current session closes, other delays will stall first shipment of waste: systems still at least six months away.

The truncature (nearly plutonium-contaminated) waste is to be buried in the $1.5 billion repository include laboratory equipment and clothing used in the production of nuclear weapons at DOE plants around the country.

Other delays include the completion of tests on the TRUFLUX facility for transporting the waste. Those tests are expected to take about a month.

Once the tests are completed, the Nuclear Regulatory commission will begin agreement for more spent nuclear fuel.
Artesia Fire Department employees, from left, Johnny Wilson, Roy Logsdon and Sammy Martinez, demonstrate operation of an air cascade trailer recently provided to the department by the Department of Energy for use in WIPP-related accidents.

Fire Dept. gets WIPP mishap gear

The Artesia Fire Department is one of nine New Mexico fire departments to take delivery recently of equipment designed for use in Waste Isolation Pilot Plant-related accidents. The cities are along the WIPP transportation route.

An air cascade trailer, manufactured in Artesia by Artesia Fire Equipment and provided by the U.S. Department of Energy, is equipped with four air bottles and an apparatus for refilling air packs worn by emergency responders.

The trailer will allow responders to refill air packs at the scene of an accident rather than having to return to the fire station or having to take the department's air compressor to the scene.

Air capacity for the trailer is more than 10,000 PSI, and each air pack holds 2,100 PSI. At the present time the trailer contains 5,000 PSI. Each air pack has a capacity of 30 minutes' breathing time.

Other cities receiving trailers are Raton, Las Vegas, Tucumcari, Santa Rosa, Santa Fe, Grants, Gallup and Roswell. All the trailers were made in Artesia.

Also, the cities each expect to receive two emergency response kits containing protective suits and respirators.
Some East Coast cities have expressed interest in shipping garbage to less expensive, less crowded landfills in New Mexico.

Wire report from Santa Fe

Soon the great state of New Mexico will be recognized by the rest of the nation not for its scenic beauty, not for cultural diversity, but for its role as the Waste Site of Tomorrow.

You can hear them talk now:

"We're up to our ears in this damn garbage. What do we do with it?"

"Well, we could rent a barge, put all the garbage on it and let it float out to sea."

"Naw, somebody tried that and it didn't work."

"How about if we pay the Mafia to dump it near the beaches?"

"No, no. Think of a legal way to get rid of it. This is an election year."

"I know! What about New Mexico? From what I hear, they will gladly take anything and bury it. They say it's good for their economy. If they take nuclear waste they'll take anything."

Be proud, fellow New Mexicans, of our state's new motto: "We take cash for your trash."

M.K.