



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
 REGION 6
 1445 ROSS AVENUE, SUITE 1200
 DALLAS, TX 75202-2733



AUG 19 1996

Honorable Max Coll
 Vice-Chairman
 Legislative Finance Committee
 State Capitol
 Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

Dear Mr. Coll:

Your letter of July 31, 1996, to Ms. Kathleen McGinty has been referred to me because the Department of Energy's (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) is in this Region. Your letter stated your concerns about the occurrence of lead-laden water at the WIPP site in Carlsbad, New Mexico.

This office has discussed the issue of the lead-laden water discovered at the WIPP site, with the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED). It appears the lead problem at the WIPP was discovered when the fan volume was reduced during weekends for economic reasons. The reduction in fan volume could have caused water precipitation to form on the walls of the Exhaust Shaft and flow down the shaft and down gradient into the Salt Handling Shaft sump. Formation waters could also be contributing to this flow. Water samples showed lead concentrations exceeding Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) regulatory levels. Plausible explanations for the source of the lead, according to DOE, are the chain link fence used for support in the Exhaust Shaft and/or the lead wool packing behind the Exhaust Shaft liner.

The WIPP is complying with the generator standards codified at 20 NMAC 4.1, Subpart III, 40 CFR part 262 under the regulatory authority of the NMED. Wastes classified as "RCRA hazardous" [exceeding the regulatory limit for lead] are being shipped to a permitted disposal facility. These regulations require the generator to characterize, accumulate, and ship all hazardous wastes to a permitted facility for treatment, storage, or disposal.



The NMED is currently requesting that DOE perform additional activities to determine the source and extent of lead contamination at the WIPP site. EPA will continue discussions with the NMED concerning this issue. If we can be of further assistance in this matter, please contact Mr. Rafael Casanova at (214) 665-7437.

Sincerely yours,



Allyn M. Davis, Director
Multimedia Planning and
Permitting Division

cc: The White House
Mr. Peter Umhofer