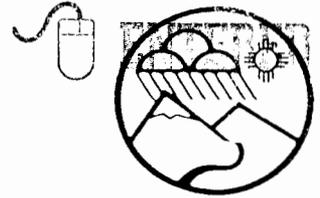




GARY E. JOHNSON
GOVERNOR

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MARK E. WEIDLER
SECRETARY

EDGAR T. THORNTON, III
DEPUTY SECRETARY

November 15, 1996

Mr. George E. Dials
Manager, Carlsbad Area Office
U.S. Department of Energy
P.O. Box 3090
Carlsbad, New Mexico 88221

Dear Mr. Dials:

Thank you for your letter to Governor Gary Johnson dated October 24, 1996, concerning the recent National Academy of Sciences (NAS) report on "The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant: A Potential Solution for the Disposal of Radioactive Waste." Governor Johnson has forwarded your letter to me for response.

NMED's Hazardous and Radioactive Materials Bureau (HRMB) staff have received and reviewed this report, and note that "The focus of the committee's review has been on the long-term, post-closure performance of WIPP. The issues associated with the operational phase, both surface and sub-surface, as well as the activities that must occur at other DOE sites, are not included in this evaluation" (page 14). Since NMED's concern is focused on the operational and closure periods of WIPP, the NAS report is more relevant to EPA's regulatory mandate.

If you need further information on this issue, please contact Mr. Benito J. Garcia of my staff at (505) 827-1557.

Sincerely,


Mark E. Weidler
Secretary

MEW:SOZ:soz

cc: Governor Gary Johnson
Benito J. Garcia, Bureau Chief, HRMB

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