

# NEWS



From Congressman

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### Skeen Urges New Mexico to Maintain WIPP Schedule

Washington, D.C. -- In a letter to Governor Gary Johnson, Congressman Joe Skeen (R-NM) is requesting that the State of New Mexico maintain a similar pace that is required of the federal government in completing the certification process of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant.

"My intent, and that of my colleagues, in passing the WIPP Land Withdrawal Act Amendment of 1996, was to establish an aggressive yet attainable permitting schedule that ensures that WIPP will open in November, 1997," Skeen said in his letter to the governor.

"I encourage the New Mexico Environment Department to stay abreast of this impending milestone for issuing the WIPP RCRA permit," Skeen added.

The State of New Mexico is required to issue a Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) permit for WIPP. It was brought to Skeen's attention that the State was still operating under the previous schedule rather than the one set under the legislation Skeen sponsored and eventually was signed into law last year. Skeen was told that the State was not planning to issue the permit until March, 1998 which is four months later than the date WIPP is suppose to open under the legislation passed last year.

Skeen said in his letter, "Congress expects the EPA to complete its review of the 84,000-page document (certification application submitted by Department of Energy in October, 1996) by October, 1997. The State Environment Department has ample time to complete its review of Part B of the application -- 21 months to date. New Mexico has the opportunity to lead the nation in responsible permitting, 'provided all applicable health and safety standards have been met and all laws complied with,' as I stated in the legislation."

