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TRUP Progress

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DOE issues Final SEIS-II

Record of Decision expected in November

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has published the *Final Waste Isolation Pilot Plant Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS-II)*, which identifies the Proposed Action as the Preferred Alternative, while reserving rail as a future option for transportation. With this analysis, the DOE has moved closer to making a decision regarding the treatment, storage, and disposal of transuranic waste.

The Final SEIS-II analysis details the environmental impacts associated with characterizing, treating, transporting, temporarily storing, and disposing of transuranic waste.

With the Preferred Alternative, the WIPP would accept all types of defense transuranic waste that meet the waste acceptance criteria for disposal. Initially, the DOE would

transport transuranic waste by truck, primarily because of the unavailability of rail service with transit times expeditious enough to allow the DOE to meet Nuclear



Public hearings were held earlier this year.

Regulatory Commission requirements. However, the DOE would reserve the option to use rail service in the future, should suitable service become available.

The Preferred Alternative would enable the DOE to comply with the provisions of existing agreements regarding the management of transuranic waste. This alternative would reduce, to the maximum extent possible under existing law, the long-term impacts from the storage of transuranic waste at current storage sites.

There are four major differences between the Draft and the Final SEIS-II:

1. Two sites were removed—the Pantex Site and a Teledyne Brown Engineering facility—because the small amount of transuranic waste at those sites has been transferred to other DOE sites.
2. Information from the *Final Waste Management Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement* and other recently completed environmental analyses has been incorporated into the Final SEIS-II.
3. The DOE will continue to consider rail transportation of transuranic waste. The Proposed Action considered only truck shipments.
4. Volume 3, a comment response document, responds to the nearly 4,000 comments received on the Draft SEIS-II.

Based on the Final SEIS-II, the DOE will issue a Record of Decision (ROD). A ROD is a decision-making document that selects one of the alternatives studied. □

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Performance Dry Run:

Loading, shipping, and disposing... without the transuranic waste

A successful shipment of transuranic waste to the Waste

Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) requires intense planning, careful coordination, and hands-on rehearsals.

Last month, the WIPP conducted one of these rehearsals, called a Performance Dry Run. The purpose was to demonstrate the ability to:

- review and approve a waste shipment
- safely ship the waste to the WIPP and
- properly emplace it in the underground

Uncontaminated sand was used to simulate transuranic waste for the shipment, but every other aspect of the shipment was real.

Each state along the shipment route—Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico—participated in the Performance Dry Run. Outside observers included representatives of the Defense Nuclear Facility Safety Board, the Environmental Evaluation Group, and the U.S. Department of Energy.

The shipment originated at the Idaho National Engineering and



Departure from INEEL

Environmental Laboratory (INEEL). To initiate the dry run, Idaho transmitted to the WIPP data on the waste containers to be

shipped. WIPP personnel reviewed and approved the data, which gave Idaho the green light to ship a fully loaded trailer (three full TRUPACT-IIs) to the WIPP. The Transportation Tracking and Communications System (TRANSCOM) was used to track the status and position of the shipment as it progressed through the five states to the WIPP.

Upon arrival at the WIPP, the simulated waste underwent receipt inspection, the TRUPACT-IIs were unloaded, the waste was transported to the underground, and then was placed

in Panel 1, Room 7 with backfill. The simulated waste and backfill will be removed prior to arrival of actual transuranic waste shipments.

The Dry Run was accomplished without incident. The DOE anticipated six inspections of the transport vehicle en route. The first was expected as the truck left the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory; four additional inspections were expected as the shipment entered the states of Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico. The last inspection was expected on-site at the WIPP. Of the six anticipated inspections, only three occurred. No inspections were made at the borders of Utah, Wyoming, or Colorado. The shipment passed the other three inspections without any problems.

This Performance Dry Run was successful in allowing WIPP participants to demonstrate the



Arrival at the WIPP

ability to coordinate waste shipments with transuranic waste sites and the affected states, and in paving the way for actual shipments to begin in May 1998. □

Operational Readiness Review:

Transitioning to the disposal phase

Deciding whether to open the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) and actually opening it are complicated and separate activities.

In addition to addressing regulatory requirements to open, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and its contractors are actively planning for and rehearsing the activities needed for successful disposal operations. A series of reviews and exercises, called the Operational Readiness Review, is underway to make sure that staff know what to do and that the WIPP can open without a hitch.

The review process involves five major elements:

- A review by managers to make sure individual procedures are right
- An integrated checkout of the facility in a simulated operational mode to make sure staff know what to do and the facility is ready
- A performance dry run with simulated waste that starts at a transuranic waste site and ends in the WIPP underground (see related story, page 2)

- An independent review by Westinghouse senior managers to validate that the entire system is ready to receive waste
- A final verification review by the DOE to ensure that the contractor is ready.

If the Operational Readiness Review demonstrates that the WIPP is ready to begin disposal operations, the CAO manager will declare operational readiness. This declaration is required before the Secretary of Energy's April 1998 decision whether to open the WIPP as a disposal facility. □

Site spotlight:

LANL

Name: Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL)

Location: 60 miles northeast of Albuquerque and 25 miles northwest of Santa Fe

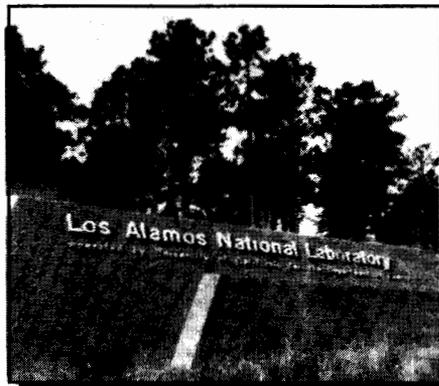
Size: 43 square miles

Transuranic waste volumes (in cubic meters): Contact-handled: Stored - 8,255, Projected - 8,781; Remote-handled: Stored - 101, Projected - 132

Mission: LANL's central mission is reducing the danger of nuclear weapons and nuclear materials worldwide.

Background: LANL, established in 1943 as Project Y of the Manhattan Engineering District, developed the world's first atomic bomb. Today, LANL is focused on stewardship and management of nuclear weapons, management of key nuclear materials, and remediation and reduction of nuclear wastes.

On September 12, 1997, the CAO manager granted authority to LANL to characterize and certify retrievably stored debris waste and transportation authority for the use of the TRUPACT-II. LANL is scheduled to be among the first sites to ship transuranic waste to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in 1998. □



Energy Communities Alliance conference held in Carlsbad

Members of the Energy Communities Alliance (ECA) met in Carlsbad, New Mexico in early October. The group includes communities that host or are significantly impacted by Department of Energy (DOE) facilities.

The ECA brings together local officials to share information, establish policy positions, and advocate community interests.

DOE Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management Al Alm and U.S. Congressmen Joe Skeen (R-NM) and Michael Crapo (R-ID) addressed the conference. Those in attendance also had the opportunity to tour the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant. □

