

United States
Environmental
Protection Agency

Region 6
External Affairs (6XA)
1445 Ross Avenue
Dallas, Texas 75202-2733

Arkansas
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Texas



December 9, 1997

ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

Following is a regional development which may be of interest to you.
If you need more information on this subject call the Office of External Affairs at (214) 665-2200.

EPA Plans Public Hearings to Receive Oral Testimony on the Agency's Proposed Compliance Certification Decision for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will conduct hearings in New Mexico to receive oral testimony on the Agency's proposal to certify that the Department of Energy's (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) meets the Agency's radioactive waste disposal standards. EPA's proposal is based on an comprehensive scientific review of DOE's application and on audits and inspections conducted by the Agency. EPA now seeks broad public comment on the proposed decision from the general public and all stakeholders.

The WIPP, located near Carlsbad, New Mexico, and under development by DOE, is a potential geologic disposal facility for transuranic radioactive waste generated from the production of nuclear weapons. Congress authorized the development of the WIPP in 1979 for the purpose of providing a research and development facility to demonstrate the safe disposal of defense-related radioactive waste that is currently stored at ten major sites throughout the nation. In 1992, Congress gave EPA the responsibility for determining whether or not the WIPP is safe to contain radioactive waste.

Hearings are scheduled as follows:

- 1) January 5, 1998 from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m.
January 6, 1998 from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Pecos River Village Conference Center, Room #3
711 Muscatel, Carlsbad, New Mexico
- 2) January 7, 1998 from 12:00 Noon to 9:00 p.m.
January 8, 1998 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 Noon
Albuquerque Convention Center, Aztec/Galisteo Room
401 Second Street, NW, Albuquerque, New Mexico
- 3) January 8, 1998 from 3:00 to 9:00 p.m.
January 9, 1998 from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Harold Runnels Building
1190 St. Francis Drive, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Those who wish to testify at the hearings are asked to pre-register by calling EPA's toll-free WIPP Information Line, 1-800-331-WIPP, Monday thru Friday between 11:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST). The following information will be required: Name, address, organizational affiliation (only if testifying as spokesperson or official representative for an organization), desired date and hearing location, time available to testify, and a daytime telephone number. Registrations must be made by 12:00 p.m. (Noon) EST December 30, 1997, in order to guarantee an opportunity to testify. Speakers not registered in advance may register at the door and will be scheduled to testify, if openings are still available.

Individual speakers will be allocated five minutes and individuals testifying as the official representative or spokesperson on behalf of groups or organizations will be allocated ten minutes for an oral presentation exclusive of any time consumed by questions from the government panel and answers to their questions.

EPA will consider all oral and written comments before the Agency publishes its final decision. All written comments which are submitted outside of the public hearings must be received by the HQ EPA Air Docket by February 27, 1998. A copy of EPA's proposed decision on the WIPP is available on EPA's World Wide Web site at: <http://www.epa.gov/radiation/wipp> and in the *Federal Register* at 62 FR 58791-58838. ###

