

DOE NEWS

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 22, 1998

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY ISSUES DECISIONS ON TRANSURANIC WASTE Supports Opening of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

The Department of Energy (DOE) today announced major decisions on the treatment, storage and disposal of its transuranic waste, a type of radioactive waste generated as a result of defense operations. The Department of Energy will dispose of its defense-generated transuranic waste at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) after it is treated as needed and packaged to meet WIPP's waste acceptance criteria. The department also decided that its sites with transuranic waste will prepare this waste on-site and store the waste until disposal at WIPP, except the Sandia National Laboratory in New Mexico. Sandia will ship its transuranic waste to Los Alamos National Laboratory for treatment and interim storage.

These decisions are contained in two Records of Decision, *The Record of Decision for the Department of Energy's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant Disposal Phase (WIPP ROD)* and *The Record of Decision for the Department of Energy's Waste Management Program: Treatment and Storage of Transuranic Waste (WM PEIS ROD)*.

Secretary of Energy Federico Peña said, "These decisions are an important step toward achieving one of the department's main objectives -- the safe, efficient environmental cleanup of Department of Energy sites nationwide. We reached these decisions after extensive environmental analysis and public comment."

The WIPP is a geologic repository, constructed to provide underground disposal for the department's defense-generated transuranic wastes. Located 2,150 feet below the earth's surface in bedded salt, the WIPP site occupies 16 square miles in southeastern New Mexico, approximately 25 miles from Carlsbad. The transuranic waste to be disposed of at WIPP comes from the department's nuclear weapons production and dismantlement, and research and development activities. Examples of transuranic waste ranges from unprocessed laboratory trash (such as tools, paper, glassware, or gloves) to solidified waste water treatment sludge contaminated with plutonium and other radioactive elements.

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In the WIPP ROD, the Department of Energy decided to dispose of its defense-generated transuranic waste at WIPP after it is treated as needed and packaged to meet waste acceptance criteria for the disposal facility. Transportation of the waste to WIPP will initially be by truck, although the department may use commercial rail transportation in the future. The department is working toward opening WIPP in May 1998. DOE anticipates that its sites in Colorado, Idaho, and New Mexico will be the first to begin shipping their transuranic waste to WIPP.

In the WM PEIS ROD, the department decided that prior to disposal, its sites with transuranic waste will prepare its waste on-site and store the waste where it was prepared until it is shipped to WIPP, except the Sandia National Laboratory in New Mexico. Sandia will transfer its transuranic waste to the Los Alamos National Laboratory. Los Alamos will have facilities, not available or anticipated at SNL-NM, to prepare and store this waste prior to disposal at WIPP. This record of decision affects waste at Department of Energy sites in 15 states. In the future, the department may decide to ship transuranic waste to its sites in Idaho, South Carolina, Tennessee and Washington from sites where the department concludes that it would be impractical to prepare those wastes for disposal. Any future decisions to transfer transuranic waste are contingent upon review under the National Environmental Policy Act, completion of regulatory review, and consistency with agreements between the department and various states concerning waste management at the department's sites.

Today's decisions are based upon two environmental impact statements completed by the department last year. These studies evaluated the environmental effects and potential cost of nationwide alternatives for managing of approximately 175,000 cubic meters of transuranic waste. Both studies included extensive public input through comments and meetings.

The September 1997 *Waste Isolation Pilot Plant Disposal Phase Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement* (WIPP SEIS-II) evaluated alternatives for disposal, level of treatment, and transportation of transuranic waste. This study recommended that WIPP be selected as the Nation's permanent repository for defense-generated radioactive transuranic waste.

The May 1997 *Waste Management Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement* (WM PEIS) analyzed locations within DOE for waste facilities for five types of radioactive and hazardous wastes. The Record of Decision for the treatment and storage of transuranic waste is the first of several decisions to be issued based on this study. Decisions on where the department will locate waste management operations will be forthcoming for the other waste types beginning later this year.

Copies of the department's decisions can be obtained from the Center for Environmental Management Information, P.O. Box 23769, Washington, D.C. 20026-3769, or by calling toll-free 1-800/736-3282 (in D.C.: 202/863-5084). The decisions are also posted on the Internet, at address <http://www.em.doe.gov/em30/>.

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U.S. Department of Energy's Record of Decision Disposal of Transuranic Waste at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

The Department of Energy announces its decision to dispose of defense-generated transuranic (TRU) waste at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). Located in southeastern New Mexico 26 miles east of Carlsbad, WIPP's facilities include disposal rooms excavated 2,150 feet (almost half a mile) underground in an ancient, stable salt formation.

The Department has issued its Record of Decision following publication of the *Waste Isolation Pilot Plant Disposal Phase Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement* (September 1997), which evaluated alternatives for disposal, level of treatment, and transportation of TRU waste.

Transuranic Waste Defined

TRU waste is generated from nuclear weapons production and dismantlement, and research and development activities. TRU waste can include anything contaminated with manmade radioactive elements heavier than uranium, mostly plutonium. TRU waste generally consists of, for example, protective clothing, tools, piping, and air filters.

Transuranic Waste Locations

The Department's TRU waste is located in California, Kentucky, Ohio, Colorado, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Idaho, Nevada, South Carolina, Illinois, New Mexico, Tennessee, Iowa, New York, and Washington.

The Department's Decision

The Department of Energy will dispose of up to 175,600 cubic meters (6.2 million cubic feet) of its TRU waste after preparation (including treatment, as necessary, and packaging) to meet the waste acceptance criteria for WIPP described in the WIPP Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement-II. This waste includes TRU waste accumulated in above ground storage since 1970 and TRU waste to be generated over approximately the next 35 years.

Transportation of waste to WIPP will initially be by truck, although the Department may use commercial rail transportation in the future.

The Department's decision is consistent with the intent of Congress, as expressed in the WIPP Land Withdrawal Act, that DOE commence disposal operations at WIPP once all applicable health and safety standards and laws have been met. By Federal mandate, the Department must safely isolate the TRU waste from the accessible environment for the regulatory period of 10,000 years.

This decision moves the Department forward toward the safe, efficient environmental cleanup of the Department's sites nationwide. The decision will also enable the Department to comply with existing agreements with several States, including agreements that set a schedule for removal of TRU waste from the Department's sites.

WIPP's Opening

WIPP is expected to begin accepting TRU waste for disposal in May 1998, pending issuance by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of a *Compliance Certification* that the facility meets regulatory requirements.

Records of Decision

The Record of Decision to dispose of defense-generated TRU waste at WIPP was prepared in coordination with a Record of Decision to prepare and store TRU wastes prior to disposal at all of the Department's sites where such waste is currently stored or will be generated in the future. Both Records of Decision were published in the January 23, 1998 issue of the *Federal Register*.

For More Information

For specific information on WIPP:

WIPP Information Center:
1-800-336-WIPP (1-800-336-9477)

National Transuranic Waste Program Home Page: <http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>

For general information on or copies of the Records of Decision: Center for Environmental Management, 1-800-736-3282 (in D.C., 202-863-5084)

Waste Management Home Page: <http://www.em.doe.gov/em30/>



U.S. Department of Energy's Record of Decision Transportation of Transuranic Waste to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

In a Record of Decision issued January 23, 1998, the Department of Energy announced its intent to dispose of its defense-generated transuranic (TRU) waste at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), near Carlsbad, NM, and to transport the waste to WIPP by truck. TRU waste can be anything contaminated with manmade radioactive elements heavier than uranium, mostly plutonium. Examples include protective clothing, tools, piping, and air filters.

Approximately 40,000 shipments of TRU waste are expected to arrive at WIPP over its 35-year period of operation. Trucks will travel to WIPP from the Department's TRU waste sites over routes designated by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and the States along each route, and in compliance with DOT and Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) requirements.

Packaging TRU Waste for Shipment

TRU waste is packaged and handled to avoid risk to people. Containers with contact-handled TRU waste can be lifted and moved directly by trained workers. Containers with remote-handled TRU waste require special shielding and special training for workers.

Trucks will transport contact-handled TRU waste to WIPP in NRC-approved packages called TRUPACT-IIs. Each truck could carry as many as three TRUPACT-IIs, each of which can hold up to fourteen 55-gallon drums or two waste boxes.

Trucks will transport remote-handled TRU waste in containers called RH-72B casks, which are currently awaiting NRC certification. Each truck could carry a single canister containing up to three 55-gallon drums of TRU waste.

Ensuring Safety

The Department ensures safe shipments through:

— **Waste Acceptance Criteria:** Before being shipped to WIPP, all waste must be characterized and packaged according to strict safety criteria for transportation.

— **Safe Shipping Containers:** The TRUPACT-II and the RH-72B cask are constructed to withstand severe accidents without releasing their contents.

— **Stringent Driver Qualifications:** Drivers must pass strict traffic safety and emergency response exams, maintain good driving records, and renew their certifications every year.

— **Emergency Response Training:** In addition to its own emergency response capabilities, the Department of Energy has and will continue to provide emergency response training to police, fire, and medical personnel located along the WIPP transportation routes.

— **Advance Notification:** A shipment schedule will be provided to affected States and Tribes each year, with a mid-year update.

— **Safety Inspections:** States perform an enhanced inspection of the vehicle and its contents before a shipment leaves a site to confirm the vehicle's safety.

— **Advanced Tracking System:** The Transportation Tracking and Communications System uses communications and satellite equipment to track each truck along its route. State and Tribal emergency response and law enforcement officials can use the system to track shipments through their jurisdictions. The system also makes the appropriate notifications prior to a shipment crossing a State's border.

Future Rail Option

The Department may decide to use commercial rail service for TRU waste transportation in the future in order to reduce the number of shipments. Any future plans to use rail service will be made with State, Tribal and local involvement.

For More Information

The Record of Decision was published in the January 23, 1998, issue of the *Federal Register*. Information on the transportation of TRU waste to WIPP is available from:

WIPP Information Center:
1-800-336-WIPP (1-800-336-9477)

National Transuranic Waste
Program Home Page: <http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>



U.S. Department of Energy's Record of Decision Waste Management Program: Treatment and Storage of Transuranic Waste

Record of Decision

The Department of Energy has issued a Record of Decision announcing its decision on where the Department will prepare its transuranic (TRU) waste for disposal and storage until shipment to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP).

This is the first of a series of Records of Decision on each of the five waste types evaluated in the *Department of Energy Waste Management Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (WM PEIS, May 1997)*.

Background

For each of the five waste types, i.e., *low-level waste, low-level mixed waste, transuranic waste, high-level waste, and hazardous waste*, the WM PEIS analyzed alternative configurations of the Department's sites for locating waste management operations. Some alternatives evaluated decentralized approaches, in which all or most of the Department's sites would manage their own waste, while other alternatives evaluated regionalized or centralized approaches, in which the Department would consolidate its waste management operations.

TRU Waste Defined

TRU waste is generated from nuclear weapons production and dismantlement, and research and development activities. TRU waste can include anything contaminated with manmade radioactive elements heavier than uranium, mostly

plutonium. TRU waste generally consists of, for example, protective clothing, tools, piping, and air filters.

The Department's Decision

The Department will use a decentralized approach for the preparation and storage of its TRU waste prior to disposal. This means that each of its sites having or generating TRU waste in the future will store it on site while preparing it for shipment to WIPP. An exception to this is that the Sandia National Laboratory in New Mexico will transfer its TRU waste to the Los Alamos National Laboratory, also in New Mexico, for preparation and storage prior to disposal.

Preparing TRU Waste for Disposal

To prepare the waste for shipment to WIPP, the Department will use either fixed or mobile facilities to characterize, treat (as needed) and package the waste to meet waste acceptance criteria for disposal at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant near Carlsbad, NM. In the future, the Department may decide to transfer TRU waste from sites where it may be impractical to treat the waste to meet WIPP waste acceptance criteria to other sites having the necessary facilities. Such decisions, however, would be subject to regulatory review and to applicable agreements between the Department and affected States where TRU waste is stored.

Disposal at WIPP

The Department has coordinated its Record of Decision on the nationwide configuration of sites for treating and storing TRU waste with its Record of Decision following the *Waste Isolation Pilot Plant Disposal Final Phase Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (WIPP SEIS-II, September 1997)*.

The WIPP SEIS-II Record of Decision identifies WIPP, a geologic repository near Carlsbad, NM, as the *disposal location* of TRU waste and requires that the *level of treatment* to prepare the waste conform to the waste acceptance criteria (Revision 5 as described in the WIPP SEIS-II) for WIPP.

Decisions Published

The Department of Energy published these two Records of Decision on the treatment, storage and disposal of TRU waste in the January 23, 1998, edition of the *Federal Register*.

For More Information

Center for Environmental Management, 1-800-736-3282 (in D.C., 202-863-5084)

Waste Management Home Page:
<http://www.em.doe.gov/em30/>

WIPP Information Center:
1-800-336-WIPP (1-800-336-9477)

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