



# TRU Progress



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A Publication of the U.S. Department of Energy Carlsbad Area Office

## SEIS-II Record of Decision: DOE reaches decision to dispose of transuranic waste at the WIPP

After evaluating potential environmental impacts and environmental consequences of transporting and disposing of waste in the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has concluded it should proceed with waste disposal. The *WIPP Final Disposal Phase Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement* (SEIS-II) was done to help the DOE decide whether to open the WIPP and, if so, to determine:

- Which portions of the transuranic waste inventory to dispose of
- To what minimum level transuranic waste must be treated?

- What mode of transportation to use.

### Waste inventory

The decision directs the WIPP to accept defense-generated transuranic waste that has been placed in retrievable storage since 1970. It also will accept transuranic waste generated during the next 35 years. No PCB-commingled waste or commercial waste will be accepted at the WIPP.

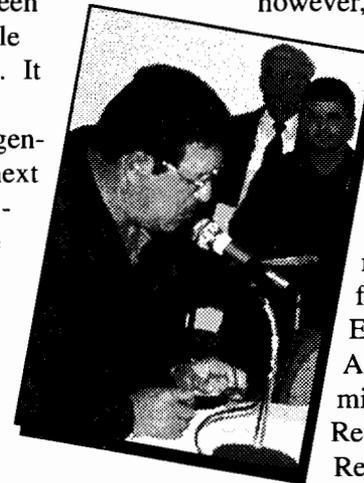
### Waste treatment

At a minimum, waste will be treated to meet the WIPP waste acceptance criteria. These criteria set limits on the physical, radiological, and chemical

composition of waste acceptable for disposal.

### Transportation

Transportation of waste to the WIPP will initially be by truck. The DOE, however, will continue to consider the future use of non-dedicated rail transportation.



Tom Quintela, a Carlsbad resident, testifying about the SEIS-II.

Implementation of the record of decision is contingent upon the DOE receiving compliance certification from the Environmental Protection Agency. The disposal of mixed waste also requires a Resource Conservation and Recovery Act permit from the New Mexico Environment Department.

In a separate record of decision for the *Waste Management Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement*, the DOE decided that waste from Sandia National Laboratories will be consolidated at Los Alamos National Laboratory. All other transuranic waste will remain at current sites until shipment to the WIPP. □

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**Compliance certification:**

# EPA issues proposed rule

One year and a day after the Carlsbad Area Office submitted the Compliance Certification Application (CCA) to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a proposed rule to certify the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) was published in the Federal Register. This action by the EPA on October 30, 1997 began a 120-day comment period that will end on February 27, 1998.

The proposed rule is based on the EPA's conclusion that the CCA and supplemental materials satisfy the requirements of the EPA's compliance criteria (Title 40, Code of Federal Regulations, Section 194). The EPA therefore believes that the WIPP will safely contain the transuranic radioactive waste to be disposed of 2,150 feet below ground.

The certification decision is subject to conditions summarized below.

1. DOE must use special concrete barriers to seal waste inside the facility.
2. DOE must obtain EPA's approval of quality assurance plans for each site.
3. EPA must evaluate the acceptability of each site's waste characterization plans.
4. DOE must develop an implementation plan for passive institutional controls.

In addition, the DOE is required to report any changes in activities or conditions at the WIPP that differ from those described in the CCA or

that might cause the WIPP to exceed the containment requirements of the disposal regulations.

The EPA is anticipated to issue a final rule certifying the WIPP in April 1998, after considering comments from stakeholders.

### Public Involvement

Comments may be submitted, in duplicate, to:

Air Docket  
Room M-1500, Mailcode 6102  
U.S. EPA  
401 M Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20460.

Comments must be received no later than February 27, 1998.

As announced in the *CAO Monthly Calendar*, public hearings were held in Carlsbad, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe, New Mexico in early January. Several hundred people participated in the hearings.

Stakeholders may find a copy of the proposed rule (with more information about the conditions) on the EPA's home page at <http://www.epa.gov/radiation/wipp>. □

# 1998

**Have a safe and happy  
new year!**

### Site spotlight:

# S R S

Name: Savannah River Site

Location: Southeast of Aiken,  
South Carolina

Size: 310 square miles

Transuranic waste volumes (in cubic meters): Contact-handled:  
Stored - 9,165, Projected - 3,773; Remote-handled: 0

Mission: To serve the interests of the nation and surrounding region by applying its technical, physical, and human resources to protect and improve environmental quality; support a secure national defense and reduce the nuclear danger; and enhance industrial competitiveness and economic development in a safe, environmentally sound, socially responsible, and cost-effective manner in partnership with its stakeholders.

Background: The Savannah River Site was created in 1950 to produce special radioactive isotopes used for the development and production of nuclear weapons. The site also produced other special isotopes to support research in nuclear medicine, space exploration, and commercial applications. □





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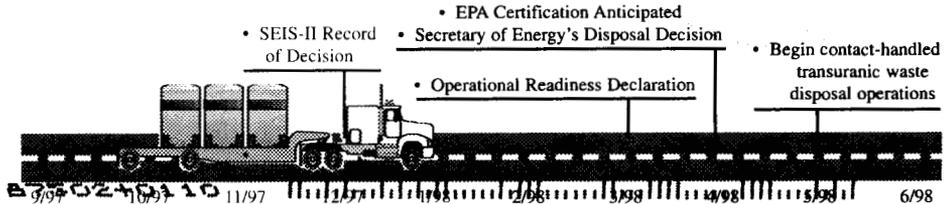
For more information:

Call 1-800-336-WIPP  
(1-800-336-9477) or

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

New Mexico Environment Department  
P.O. Box 20110  
Santa Fe, NM 87502-0110  
FEB 1998

**TRU** is the abbreviation  
for **transuranic**, the  
classification of radioactive waste  
to be disposed of at the  
Waste Isolation Pilot Plant.



## National Transuranic Program:

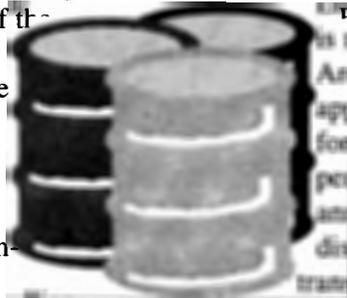
# Waste Isolation Pilot Plant on track for May 1998 opening

Trucks loaded with transuranic waste are scheduled to begin rolling toward the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in May. However, not all the waste planned for disposal at the WIPP will be allowed to be shipped that early. A Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) permit from the state of New Mexico has been delayed; therefore, only non-mixed transuranic waste will be shipped and disposed of until a RCRA permit is received.

Non-mixed transuranic waste (waste not mixed with hazardous

components) will be shipped thirty days after Energy Secretary Federico Peña notifies Congress that all the requirements of the Land Withdrawal Amendments Act have been met.

Shipment of the other category of waste, called mixed transuranic waste, will have to wait a while longer. Handling and disposal of transuranic waste that is also contaminated with hazardous materials, such as lead or



cleaning solvents, requires a RCRA permit from the state of New Mexico. The New Mexico Environment Department is reviewing the Carlsbad Area Office's permit application, but no date for issuing the draft permit has been announced. Shipment and disposal of the mixed transuranic waste can begin after a final permit has been issued.