



Department of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

April 3, 1998

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Mr. Mark E. Weidler
Secretary, New Mexico Environment Department
1190 St. Francis Drive
P.O. Box 26110
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502-6110

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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Dear Secretary Weidler:

Thank you for your letter to the Secretary of Energy of February 2, 1998, regarding the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) located near Carlsbad, New Mexico. I am pleased to hear the New Mexico Environment Department plans to issue the WIPP draft permit for hazardous waste disposal in the near future. We look forward to receiving the draft permit and working with your office toward prompt issuance of the final permit.

The removal and safe disposal of transuranic waste from waste generator sites is one of my highest priorities. It would be irresponsible to delay cleanup of transuranic waste longer than legally necessary. That is why the Department of Energy (Department) intends to begin shipment of transuranic waste to WIPP once all necessary prerequisites are met.

Let me assure you the Department is proceeding with the characterization of transuranic waste in full compliance with applicable laws and regulations. We welcome the opportunity to review our waste characterization procedures with your staff. In fact, on March 27, 1998, your staff participated in a waste characterization briefing at Los Alamos. I asked the Carlsbad Area Office Manager, Mr. George Dials, to contact you to arrange for additional reviews.

I genuinely appreciate your sensitivity to the continuing needs of WIPP. If you have further questions, please contact me or have a member of your staff contact Mr. Mark W. Frei, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Waste Management, Environmental Management at (202) 586-0670.

Sincerely,

James M. Owendoff
Acting Assistant Secretary for
Environmental Management

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