



TRU Progress

ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

Volume 3 Issue 3 Spring 1998

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

Opening day approaching:

DOE declares readiness to operate the WIPP for TRU waste disposal

The Department of Energy's (DOE) Carlsbad Area Office (CAO) declared its readiness to operate the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) for the disposal of contact-handled transuranic waste on March 26, following an expert review earlier in the month.

"Once again, we have completed another important milestone. Everything and everyone is in place to open the facility," said CAO Manager George Dials. "We are ready to go when we receive the right word from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Secretary of Energy."

A team of 15 experts from the DOE and private companies evaluated the

WIPP's personnel, equipment, and procedures to check whether the CAO can meet requirements to operate the facility for the permanent disposal of transuranic radioactive waste.

The review team, consisting of experts from DOE sites other than the CAO, identified some needed improvements in procedures and training documentation. The CAO has implemented corrective actions on those items.

The review team also verified the contractor's readiness to proceed with disposal operations. Westinghouse, the management and operating contractor at the WIPP, declared its readiness in February 1998.

An expert review and declaration of operational readiness are required



Glen Morton (Savannah River Site) and Mark Holzmer (Idaho Operations Office) were part of the review team that toured the WIPP in January.

under a DOE Order dealing with the startup of nuclear facilities.

The WIPP is scheduled to begin disposal operations in May, pending final certification from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and notification to Congress by Secretary of Energy Federico Peña that the WIPP is ready to proceed with disposa'

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Accelerating Cleanup: Paths to Closure:

Comments encouraged on draft strategy document

The U.S. Department of Energy's effort to clean up as many sites as possible by 2006 has moved forward with the recent release of the national and site-specific draft *Accelerating Cleanup: Paths to Closure* strategy documents. The national strategy, released by the DOE Office of Environmental Management, addresses issues relating to the clean-up effort at DOE sites around the country. Site-specific strategy documents address issues specific to a particular site.

The Carlsbad Area Office's (CAO) strategy document addresses how

quickly transuranic radioactive waste in temporary storage at DOE sites around the country can be made "road-ready" and shipped to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) for disposal.

This document incorporates stakeholder comments and other programmatic changes since the CAO's June 1997 release of the *Accelerating Cleanup: Focus on 2006 Discussion Draft*. A few of the major differences include:

- Only one funding scenario was analyzed, rather than analyzing a high- and a low-case scenario

- Disposal of mixed transuranic waste (transuranic waste also containing hazardous chemicals) has been delayed until early to mid fiscal year 1999
- Disposal operations for remote-handled transuranic waste will begin in January 2003 instead of September 2002
- Schedules for characterization, preparation, and packaging of disposal-ready waste at many sites have been better defined
- The transfer of transuranic waste inventories from two small-quantity sites to other sites is acknowledged

Site spotlight:

Hanford

Name: Hanford Site

Location: Richland, Washington

Size: 560 square miles

Transuranic waste volumes (in cubic meters): Contact-handled: Stored - 16,127, Projected - 7,305; Remote-handled: Stored - 200, Projected - 1,582

Background: The Hanford Site was established in secrecy during World War II to produce plutonium for America's nuclear weapons. Peak production years were reached in the 1960s when nine production reactors were in operation at the site. All weapons material production was halted in the late 1980s and the site is now engaged in one of the world's largest environmental cleanup projects.

The Hanford Site supports programs in waste management, environmental restoration, science, and energy. Shipments of contact-handled transuranic waste to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant are expected to begin in May 1999. □



Comments on the CAO strategy should be sent by May 1, 1998 to:

U.S. Department of Energy
Attn: Mr. Dennis Hurtt
Carlsbad Area Office
P.O. Box 3090
Carlsbad, NM 88221
Fax: (505) 234-7025

For copies of the CAO strategy or for more information, call the WIPP Information Center at 1-800-336-WIPP or visit the National Transuranic Waste Program Home Page at <http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>. Information on the national strategy or other sites' strategies may also be found on the Internet at <http://www.em.doe.gov>. □

Emergency response training:

WIPPTREX exercises require intergovernmental cooperation

Emergency response training and exercises have been a key element in preparing for the opening of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). An exercise called WIPPTREX (WIPP Transportation Exercise) is an opportunity for emergency responders to practice the skills they have learned while responding to a simulated emergency as if it were real.



As part of a training exercise, an emergency responder demonstrates how he would check the exterior of a shipping container for traces of radioactivity.

Training courses include First Responder, First Responder Refresher, Command and Control, and Train-the-Trainer. More than 11,000 emergency response professionals in 12 states have received some or all of this training.

The WIPPTREX exercises validate the training and competency levels of the state, tribal, local, and federal emergency preparedness agencies and focus on

WIPPTREX exercises normally require six months of preparation by a cast of federal, state, tribal, and local agencies, responders, and citizens. Here's how they typically work.

As many as 20 federal, state, tribal, and local agencies and organizations could participate. Each group is asked to provide learning and performance objectives, and the exercise scenario is created around these objectives.

Objectives for a federal agency could include demonstration of the ability to provide assistance to state, tribal, and local officials through the incident command system. A state or tribal agency's objectives may include establishment of hazard zones if necessary, while a local response organization, such as a fire department, may want to test its ability to be en route to a scene

within two minutes of notification. A hospital may want to participate to test its disaster preparedness response plan.

Emergency personnel do not know the exercise scenario ahead of time and respond as if the simulated incident were actually occurring.

Prior to an exercise, emergency response personnel are trained in the most current response techniques. What responders learn at WIPP-specific training can be applied when responding to incidents involving other hazardous or radioactive materials that are not DOE owned.

This training was reviewed and certified by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in 1993. The program has been recertified every two years since then, most recently in November 1997.

integration of effort and cooperation among the many emergency response organizations who might respond to an actual incident. □

Alternative shipping plan developed for Santa Fe

Officials from the city of Santa Fe, the U.S. Department of Energy, and the New Mexico Highway and Transportation Department have developed an alternate plan for shipping transuranic radioactive waste around the city of Santa Fe en route to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP).

Shipments will use Camino La Tierra from U.S. 84/285 south to the Santa Fe Relief Route frontage road, which will be useable by May 31. Two lanes of the entire four-lane relief route will be completed by July. □



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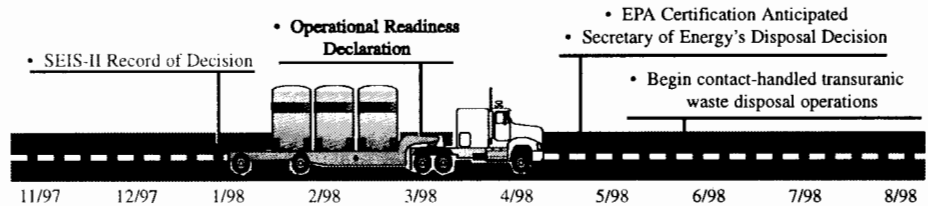
For more information:

WIPP Information Center
1-800-336-WIPP
(1-800-336-9477)
infocntr@wipp.carlsbad.nm.us

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

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



Joint Information Center:

Team ready to provide accurate information during a crisis

An important part of operational readiness is being able to communicate with stakeholders in the event of an emergency. The Carlsbad Area Office has a team of people trained to communicate effectively during a crisis. In an emergency, this group of people staff the Joint Information Center (JIC) at the Skeen-Whitlock Building in Carlsbad, New Mexico.

The JIC is activated any time the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant's (WIPP) Emergency Operations Center is activated and operates jointly with federal, state, and local

agencies. Its primary purpose is to provide a central source of accurate information for elected officials, news media, and the public. Activation can occur whether an emergency happens at the WIPP or during a shipment to the WIPP.

News media and public inquiry phone teams would be available to provide information and respond to questions. News conferences would also be held to keep the public informed of new developments.

During an emergency, the JIC would issue an initial news release

to provide news media organizations with the telephone numbers of the media phone team. The general public would be able to call the toll-free information number (1-800-336-WIPP) or a local number, which would also be included in the initial news release.

The WIPP's strict safety guidelines minimize the likelihood of emergencies. However, the JIC may help prevent incidents from causing unnecessary concern about public health and the environment by being a reliable source of accurate information. □