



**NEW MEXICO ENERGY, MINERALS
& NATURAL RESOURCES DEPARTMENT**

State
Stack 2

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Jennifer A. Salisbury
CABINET SECRETARY

May 13, 1998

MEMORANDUM

To: Governor Gary E. Johnson (hand-delivered)
Radioactive Waste Consultation Task Force
 John Chavez, Taxation and Revenue Department
 Pete Rahn, State Highway & Transportation Department
 Alex Valdez, Department of Health
 Mark Weidler, Environment Department
 Darren White, Department of Public Safety
 Senator Dede Feldman, Advisory Member & Chair
 Radioactive and Hazardous Materials Committee
 Representative John Heaton, Advisory Member & Committee Vice Chair
 George Chavez, State Fire Marshal, *Ex Officio* Task Force member
 U.S. Department of Energy-Carlsbad Area Office
 George Dials, DOE-CAO Manager
 Dennis Hurtt, DOE-CAO Office of Intergovernmental and
 External Affairs
 Ralph Smith, DOE-CAO Institutional Program Manager
 Western Governors' Association
 Ron Ross, WIPP Program Manager

From: Chris Wentz, Task Force Coordinator

Re: ATTACHED WIPP PRESS RELEASE (2 pages)





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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 13, 1998

Contact: Chris Wentz, Coordinator
N.M. Radioactive Waste Task Force
505/827-1372

STATE of NEW MEXICO RECEIVES NOTICE of WIPP CERTIFICATION

Santa Fe, New Mexico—The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today notified the State of New Mexico it has certified that the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) meets the radiation protection standards in Title 40 of the *Code of Federal Regulations*, Parts 191 and 194. This EPA certification clears the way for receipt and disposal of non-mixed, contact-handled transuranic radioactive waste at WIPP next month, barring any legal challenges.

Jennifer A. Salisbury, Cabinet Secretary of the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department and Chair of the State's Radioactive Waste Task Force (*i.e.*, Governor's WIPP Task Force), made the following statement in response to the EPA's certification:

"The State of New Mexico's Radioactive Waste Task Force, commonly known as the Governor's WIPP Task Force, fully supports the EPA's decision to certify that WIPP complies with the Agency's radiation protection standards. After almost a quarter century of intense scientific study and the expenditure of over two billion dollars (\$2,000,000,000), we are confident this is the right decision and that WIPP will perform as expected, safely isolating these wastes for tens of thousands of years."

Secretary Salisbury emphasized that both the EPA and the State of New Mexico would continue to closely monitor and evaluate WIPP's performance throughout the operational life of the project. "Federal regulations require that the project be recertified by EPA every five years after opening," said Salisbury. "New Mexico intends to actively participate in this recertification process to ensure WIPP remains in compliance with the applicable regulations."

Salisbury also stressed that New Mexico has been coordinating with the U.S. Department of Energy, other corridor states, and various Indian Nations along the WIPP route for approximately 10 years in the development of a comprehensive transportation safety program for the WIPP shipping campaign. "The WIPP Safe Transportation Program includes stringent measures to prevent accidents, as well as detailed procedures and protocols for dealing effectively with a transportation emergency," stated Salisbury. Continuing, she noted that "...the program goes far beyond the minimum requirements established by law, and will make the WIPP shipments among the safest of any on the road."

(over)

The N.M. Radioactive Waste Task Force was established by state statute in 1979 (74-4A-6 New Mexico Statutes Annotated, 1978). It is composed of the Cabinet Secretaries of six State agencies, including New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department; Environment Department; Department of Health; Department of Public Safety; Taxation and Revenue Department (Motor Transportation Division); and the State Highway and Transportation Department. The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Interim Radioactive and Hazardous Materials Committee of the New Mexico Legislature also serve on the Task Force as advisory members. The Task Force represents the Executive Branch of New Mexico State Government in all areas relating to the licensing and operation of the WIPP Project, including transportation issues.

The WIPP is a mined geologic repository located 2,150 feet underground in a 250-million-year-old bedded salt formation. It is situated approximately 30 miles east of Carlsbad, New Mexico, and is intended for the permanent disposal of defense transuranic (TRU) radioactive waste. TRU waste consists primarily of clothing, tools, rags, debris, residues and other disposable items contaminated with trace amounts of radioactive elements, mostly plutonium.