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LETTERS TO THE JOURNAL

WIPP Woes Due to DOE, Not State

RE: "STATE'S WIPP Permit Goes Beyond Prudence" letter by Department of Energy general counsel Mary Anne Sullivan

Ms. Sullivan says that it would be "reckless disregard" of workers' interests to require opening of a large number of drums before they can be shipped to WIPP. Ms. Sullivan ignores the facts:

- All of the drums shipped from Los Alamos National Laboratory to WIPP were opened. So, the permit requirement for much less than 100 percent of the drums to be opened is less rigorous than DOE's own practice at Los Alamos.

- DOE's WIPP manager told the National Academy of Sciences that there were no radiation exposures to workers from opening those drums.

- DOE's assistant WIPP manager testified under oath at the permit hearing that DOE had no data showing any radiation exposure to work-

ers anywhere from opening drums.

- At the permit hearing, there was uncontroverted evidence that DOE's drum contents records are severely inaccurate and that only by opening the drums could chemically incompatible wastes prohibited at WIPP be identified.

Ms. Sullivan also says that the requirement that Westinghouse provide financial assurance to pay future cleanup costs at WIPP is unprecedented. Yet, on November 2, DOE signed an agreement with the state of Tennessee to provide \$14 million in financial assurance to pay for future cleanup costs at a new mixed-waste landfill at Oak Ridge.

Because of the financial assurance requirement, DOE plans to take money from New Mexico used to improve safety of highways to WIPP. Yet:

- DOE is not taking money away from its Idaho site, even though it

made only 44 percent of the shipments planned for this year.

- DOE is not taking money from its Colorado site, even though it made only 56 percent of the shipments planned for this year.

Those wastes sent to WIPP did not meet the permit requirements, yet it would take 580 years to fill WIPP to capacity at the rate of shipments over the past eight months. DOE's history of not taking care of its waste in New Mexico and elsewhere is the problem, not the requirements of the permit.

As for DOE's commitment to pay for future cleanup costs, that's no better than its oft-stated commitment to not ship any wastes to WIPP until the permit was issued.

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