

WIPP Quick Facts (As of 8-31-11)

9,922

Shipments received since opening
(9,412 CH and 510 RH)

77,352

Cubic meters of waste disposed
(77,095 CH and 257 RH)

150,976

Containers disposed in the underground
(150,466 CH and 510 RH)

WIPP receives first TRUPACT-III shipment



The TRUPACT-III shipping package arrives at the WIPP site.

The first TRUPACT-III waste-shipping package has arrived at WIPP.

The shipment, which originated at the Savannah River Site (SRS) near Aiken, S.C., arrived at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant on August 25. The TRUPACT-III, or Transuranic Package Transporter-Model 3, transports a single box of defense-generated contact-handled (CH) transuranic (TRU) waste that is too large to ship in other available transportation packages.

"The WIPP transportation system is considered by many as being the best in the business," said Interim Carlsbad Field Office Manager Ed Ziemianski. "WIPP's shipping packages, including the new TRUPACT-III, have an essential role in maintaining that reputation. It took a tremendous effort by federal and contractor employees to get this new package on the road. I certainly appreciate the effort that went into meeting this milestone."



CBFO representatives and guest stand in front of the first TRUPACT-III shipment prior to the package entering the WIPP site. From left to right, CBFO Transportation Packaging Manager Mike Brown, CBFO Site Operations Manager Casey Gadbury, National TRU Program Director J.R. Stroble, State Representative Cathryn Brown, CAST Truck Driver Randy Anderson, CBFO Interim Manager Ed Ziemianski, and CAST Truck Driver Henry Leyva.

TRUPACT-III is 8.2 feet wide, 8.7 feet tall and 14 feet long. Empty, the waste-shipping package weighs about 43,600 pounds. Loaded, the weight can increase to as much as 55,100 pounds (compared to 19,250 pounds for a TRUPACT-II, WIPP's primary shipping package). The Nuclear Regulatory Commission certified the TRUPACT-III waste-shipping package in 2010.

The rectangular-shaped packaging of the TRUPACT-III consists of inner and outer stainless steel plates and polyurethane foam to protect against potential punctures and fire danger. The TRUPACT-III's payload is a single Standard Large Box 2 that will contain up to 260 cubic feet of CH waste, which is equivalent to 35 55-gallon drums. One TRUPACT-III is transported to WIPP by truck on a custom designed trailer.



The TRUPACT-III left the Savannah River Site in the morning on Wednesday, August 24.

Until now, CH-TRU waste leaving SRS was packaged exclusively in smaller standard waste boxes, ten-drum overpacks or 55-gallon drums, the three containers that for a decade have been transported to WIPP in the cylinder-shaped TRUPACT-II package.

This is the first of six TRUPACT-III units manufactured for use in transporting large-box waste to WIPP. The cylindrical TRUPACT -II and HalfPACT shipping packages will continue to be used for the majority of CH shipments to WIPP.



Members of the TRUPACT-III team at the Savannah River Site in front of the first shipment prior to its departure to WIPP.

Waste hoist repaired safely ahead of schedule

The effectiveness of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant's (WIPP) preventive maintenance program paid huge dividends recently when an issue with a steel rope on the project's waste conveyance was identified during a routine inspection.



(Left to right) Javier Leyva, Bruce Jeffress and Jerry Foster perform the installation of the new head rope on the waste conveyance.

Disposal operations at the WIPP site, near Carlsbad, New Mexico, were halted for eight days as a maintenance team replaced one of six steel ropes used to suspend the waste conveyance, which is used to download defense-generated transuranic (TRU) waste 2,150 feet into the underground repository.

Shipments and disposal operations resumed after a new 2,300-foot-long head rope, weighing more than five tons, was safely installed by maintenance and operations crews ahead of schedule.

"This kind of safe, compliant, and efficient performance is simply outstanding and worthy of emulation in all that we do," said Interim Carlsbad Field Office Manager Ed Ziemianski, praising the maintenance efforts.

The issue was discovered during a routine inspection on July 18, when maintenance technicians observed that one strand of wire on Head Rope #1 was displaced on the coil by about a quarter inch. Head Rope #1 is one of six 1 3/8" diameter steel ropes that suspend the conveyance from the hoist. Each rope consists of 151 interlocking strands of wire. The head ropes undergo weekly visual inspections and semi-annual detailed examinations, during which engineers check the interlocking wires for wear or damage.



The new 2,300 foot-long head rope was installed on the waste conveyance on July 26.

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The displacement of a single strand of wire on one of the waste conveyance's six steel ropes did not present a danger to WIPP employees or operations. Each of the steel ropes is capable of supporting the 45-ton design capacity of the conveyance.

"Given the rope's lock coil design, if any of the outer wires are displaced, this is a distortion of the rope structure and it must be removed from service according to Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) regulations," noted Bob Kirby, WTS Underground Operations manager.

Kirby said one of the reasons maintenance was completed ahead of schedule was because the team relied on experience gained from replacing a tail rope during last year's maintenance shutdown, and from replacing a head rope in 2003.

"The team we put together did an excellent job, and performed the work safely, compliantly and efficiently. It was an excellent show of teamwork by everyone involved," Kirby said.

URS Washington TRU Solutions receives President's Award for Safety Excellence



Washington TRU Solutions Employees were presented with the URS President's Award for Safety Excellence. Accepting on behalf of WTS employees were (l to r) President and General Manager Farok Sharif, Bobby Espinoza, Jill Farnsworth, Mary Ann Mullins and URS Vice President for Safety Brad Giles.

Washington TRU Solutions (WTS), the WIPP management and operating contractor, received the URS President's Award for Safety Excellence. The award was presented to WTS employees by Brad Giles, URS vice president for safety.

The President's Award for Safety Excellence is awarded to projects that complete 1 million consecutive exposure hours without a lost time (day away from work) accident in excess of 12 months time.

"Safety is number one here at WIPP," WTS Manager of Safety and Health Tim Rotert said. "We want to make sure that at the end of the day, every one of our employees goes home safely to their families. This award just shows the hard work everyone strives for to make sure that happens."

WTS employees have worked over 3.6 million hours without a lost time injury. This is the eighth time WTS has received this award.



MSHA District Manager for the South Central Region Eddie Lopez presents Webb with a replica of the award given to national mine rescue champions.

Mine Rescue Legend Retires from WIPP

The trainer's chair for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant's (WIPP) mine rescue team is going to be awfully hard to fill.

Hobbs resident Harlan "Buddy" Webb, who led and trained the WIPP's mine rescue teams for more than two decades, retired from URS Washington TRU Solutions in July. Webb's storied career features a lifelong dedication to safety that saw him inducted into the Mine Safety Health Administration's mine rescue hall of fame.



CBFO Interim Manager Ed Ziemianski presents a WIPP plaque to Webb. Left to right, CBFO Facility Representative Don Galbraith, Webb, Ziemianski and WTS President and General Manager Farok Sharif.



Webb's wife, Ann, came to WIPP in support of the celebration.

"Buddy Webb's passion for having his mine rescue teams ready to rescue fellow miners is unparalleled," said Neal Merrifield, MSHA's Administrator for Metal and Nonmetal Mine Safety and Health. "His exemplary efforts to train award-winning teams, as well as his support for the entire metal and nonmetal mining community, will truly be missed."

Webb was born in Ada, Oklahoma, but moved to Hobbs at a young age when his father took a job in the oilfields. In 1965, he took a job with the Kerr-McGee Potash Corporation as a junior engineer.

"Back then, mine rescue training consisted of the state bringing in a guy once a year," he said. "But the law changed that."

Over the past few decades, changes in the law have added important safety procedures and equipment and allowed miners to be more open about their safety concerns. Webb appreciated the growing emphasis on mining safety, and he became involved in mine rescue training in 1978.

"I just wanted to be involved, and I liked the idea of helping my fellow man," he said.

The state's first mine rescue competition was held in 1981. That year, the New Mexico Mine Rescue Association was also established, and Webb became the organization's first secretary and one of the founding members.

In 1985, Kerr-McGee's safety director, Ray Nations, made the transition from the potash mine to the Department of Energy. Nations recruited Webb to join WIPP's mine engineering department, and Webb also became a member of WIPP's mine rescue team.

Webb said his first few years on WIPP's mine rescue team were one of his favorite professional times.



The WIPP Red and Blue mine rescue teams presented Buddy Webb with a framed photo and a golf bag with the mine rescue logo stitched on it.

"It was just such a good group of guys," he said. "I made a lot of good friendships."

Webb quickly became the WIPP mine rescue team's trainer as well, and the program has flourished under his watch. He enjoys both training and competing, and mine rescue competitions include a written "test the trainer" component.

WIPP's mine rescue squad consists of two teams of eight. Webb, who retired as a senior operations engineer with WIPP's emergency management program, drilled and evaluated the two teams on a regular basis.

"Every one of them guys are very competitive," Webb said. "There's a great camaraderie among all teams and all team members, but it's also very important to all of us."

WIPP's mine rescue teams routinely train to respond should an emergency situation arise in the underground at WIPP, but the teams are also prepared to assist with other potential dangers both locally and internationally.

In addition to a mutual aid agreement with potash mines in the surrounding area, WIPP's mine rescue teams have helped with retrieval efforts at a mine in central New Mexico and conducted training in Arizona.

"We also traveled to Mexico to help them put on their national contest," Webb said. "We designed and judged the contest."

In the mine rescue competitions, Webb's field and bench competitors have received accolades across the country over the years. The mine rescue field competition is an exercise scenario which challenges participants with conditions that could be encountered in an underground mine emergency, including gases, fires or mine instability. The teams are evaluated as they move through the obstacle course to locate, treat and move staged victims to the surface. The benchman's competition involves troubleshooting a breathing apparatus. There have also been first aid competitions at events, and most competitions include a written test component. When he first became involved in mine rescue, Webb said he was initially apprehensive about the mock scenarios.

"I just thought that I wanted to do real mine rescue," he said.

He soon learned that the scenarios were essential in training for real rescue efforts. Although a strong competitor, Webb has always been happy to share his tips for success over the years.

“He was free with his knowledge as far as sharing it with other teams across the nation,” said WIPP mine rescue team member Joe Baca. “Any time somebody would need something or want to know about something, they would call him.”

Some other teams have been less willing to share information, Baca said, but noted that Webb’s policy has always been that the more information about safety that can be shared the better.

Webb’s dedication to mine rescue saw him offered influential positions outside of WIPP. In 2000, he was inducted into MSHA’s metal/nonmetal mine rescue hall of fame. One of his protégée’s, Baca, was inducted in 2010.



Webb with the WIPP Blue and Red Team Leaders Gary Kessler (left) and Mat Ridgeway.

In 2006, Webb became a member of the Mine Safety, Technology, and Training Commission, created and funded by the National Mining Association in response to a string of coal mining accidents. He was the only non-coal member of the commission.

Webb has also been president of the Southwestern Regional Mine Rescue Association, president of the United States Mine Rescue Association, and a member of the MSHA National Advisory board for underground rescue procedures. His ability to work well with two different groups of people has been integral, WIPP mine rescue team member Robert Rhoades said.

“Buddy was really good at being the middle man,” he said. “He’s good at communicating from up the ladder to the politicians on down to the miner’s level.”

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Webb feels his time on boards has paid off. For example, metal/non metal mines are now required to participate in mine rescue competitions under MSHA guidelines, while it had previously been optional. Webb believes the competitions are important.

Although he’s now retired from WIPP, Webb will likely stay busy in mine rescue. “I’ve been approached by multiple people, and it looks like I can be as busy as I want to be,” he said, noting that he’s yet to decide how much time he will spend consulting, versus playing golf or visiting family.”

And Webb will certainly keep in touch with his family at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant.

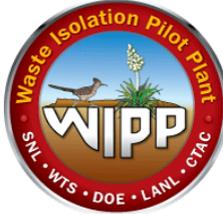
“I’m very proud of WIPP’s safety program,” he noted.

In turn, WIPP’s safety program was very lucky to have Buddy Webb.

The U.S. Department of Energy
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