



**Department of Energy**  
Carlsbad Field Office  
P. O. Box 3090  
Carlsbad, New Mexico 88221  
March 12, 2014

To Eddy and Lea County Residents:

As the Department of Energy and Nuclear Waste Partnership continue to make progress in recovering from the two recent incidents at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, I wanted to direct your attention to a very important process that will help us greatly in our recovery. After the February 5 underground fire, and again after the February 14 radiation release, teams of experts were organized to begin investigating the cause of each incident and to recommend changes in programs, processes, and procedures to prevent such incidents from happening again. I anticipate the team investigating the underground fire will finalize its report soon. The team investigating the radiological incident is expected to complete its review later this month. Both reports will be made public.

These teams consist of subject matter experts from across the Department of Energy complex and private industry, including experts from URS, the parent company of NWP. Their job is to identify the root cause of these incidents, and to identify any other factors that may have contributed to them. The teams have spent countless hours interviewing people knowledgeable about the incidents and response efforts, and reviewing reams of documents. The fire investigation team also physically inspected the fire incident scene; the radiological event team will inspect the radiological scene as soon as it is safe to do so. We expect a thorough analysis of what happened and why, and we will be getting a list of suggested corrective actions from the team.

Farok Sharif, NWP President and Project Manager, and I are thankful for the Department's resources that were applied to these two investigations, and I have made every aspect of our operations at WIPP open and available to the investigation teams. I fully expect an honest assessment of our weaknesses, and then I will hold all of us accountable for completing all of the corrective actions that are identified in order to prevent these types of incidents from occurring again.

I was recently interviewed by a reporter who asked me if I thought WIPP would ever reopen. I told him that WIPP has to reopen, and it will reopen as a safer and stronger operation than it has ever been. The input we will get from the accident investigation teams will be critical to making that happen.

Sincerely,

***//Signature on File//***

Jose R. Franco, Manager  
U.S. Department of Energy  
Carlsbad Field Office