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 @WIPPNews

WIPP UPDATES: March 18, 2014

New Air Sampling Data Shows Small Release, But No Health Impacts

New air sampling data from emission monitoring at WIPP indicated a very small additional radiation release occurred March 11, but with no expected health impacts to workers, the public or the environment. Samples collected at the same monitoring station, both prior to and for 72 hours after this release, have indicated background levels.

Data received recently show a single air sample from the ventilation exhaust recorded 61 disintegrations per minute of americium on a sample collected the evening of March 11. This is expected given the amount of contamination captured by the WIPP ventilation system during the February 14 radiation release event. Engineers believe the contamination was from previous deposits on the inner surface of the exhaust ductwork.

New air data will be posted on Thursday of each week, as it becomes available, at www.wipp.energy.gov. Current data continue to show that while occasional low level releases are anticipated, they are well below the standards designed to protect workers, the public and the environment.

The independent Carlsbad Environmental Monitoring and Research Center (CEMRC) is reporting similar environmental sampling results. According to the Center's recent news release, CEMRC's analysis continues to reflect that the air around the WIPP site is safe and poses no harm to the environment or the public. Their data can be found at www.cemrc.org.

There will be a presentation of environmental monitoring results at the 5:30 p.m. Carlsbad Town Hall meeting on Thursday, March 20, in the Carlsbad City Council Chambers, 101 N. Halagueno Street.

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More Negative Test Results for WIPP Employees

Another set of 20 urine sample results for WIPP employees has come back negative. To date, 135 employees have been entered into the WIPP bioassay program, including many who requested testing. At present, more than 100 urine samples have been analyzed and all results have been negative.

Bioassay tests determine the presence of radioactive material in the human body by measuring radiation within the body through lung counting (looking for radioactive material in the lungs), or analyzing radioactive material in urine or fecal samples. Additional results will be posted as they become available. All results to date indicate risk levels to workers are well below occupational and health standards.

NWP Names Employee Health Advocates

The Nuclear Waste Partnership (NWP), the management and operating contractor at WIPP, appointed four employees WIPP Employee Health Care Advocates to assist their fellow employees who had questions and concerns related to the two events in February. Employees can now reach out to the advocates, who will bring employee concerns or questions about their health and safety to the NWP management team for resolution.

The new WIPP Employee Health Care Advocates include: Dick Calderon, who will be available for employee members of the United Steel Workers Union; Mark Canales, who will focus on employee members of the United Government Security Officers; and Laura Garcia and Brenda Kirkes, who will serve as health advocates for the remainder of the WIPP workforce.



Joe Franco (third from left), Department of Energy Carlsbad Field Office Manager, and Bob McQuinn (fourth from left), Nuclear Waste Partnership (NWP) President and Project Manager, met with the NWP employees who were recently named as NWP Health Care Advocates. The employees are (from left) Mark Canales, Brenda Kirkes, Dick Calderon and Laura Garcia. McQuinn encouraged the health care advocates to assist their fellow employees who had questions and concerns related to the two events in February.

WIPP Has No Official Facebook Presence

Some media sources have erroneously reported that WIPP has a new Facebook page. WIPP is in the process of updating its website, but official content – including updated recovery activities, environmental monitoring results, and DOE news releases – can only be found at the WIPP Recovery web-site www.wipp.energy.gov. WIPP does have an official Twitter account: @WIPPNews.

Community Meetings Scheduled

March 20 – Carlsbad Mayor Dale Janway and DOE will co-host a Town Hall meeting Thursday, March 20, featuring updates on WIPP recovery activities and recent environmental monitoring results. Fran Williams, Director of Environmental, Safety, Health and Quality for Oak Ridge National Laboratory's contractor UCOR, will be present to answer questions. She has 35 years of experience in ESH&Q, health physics and occupational medicine.

The town hall meetings are held at 5:30 p.m. every Thursday at the Carlsbad City Council Chambers, 101 N. Halagueno Street.

March 25 – WIPP officials will update the Artesia City Council on WIPP recovery activities at 7:00 p.m. Location: 511 W. Texas Ave., Artesia.