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WIPP UPDATE: April 22, 2014

WIPP's waste disposal panels

As entries into WIPP's underground continue, it is helpful to understand the layout of the underground facility. Currently, the entries are focused on gathering information in the waste disposal area, which currently encompasses seven panels. Each of these panels consists of seven disposal rooms, and each room is nearly the length of a football field.

The disposal rooms permanently store defense-generated transuranic radioactive waste from the research and production of nuclear weapons. Transuranic waste has one of two designations — contact-handled, which has lower radioactivity and can be manually sorted and repackaged by workers wearing protective clothing, and remote-handled, which has higher radioactivity and is processed in hot cells by employee-controlled manipulators using a shielded configuration.

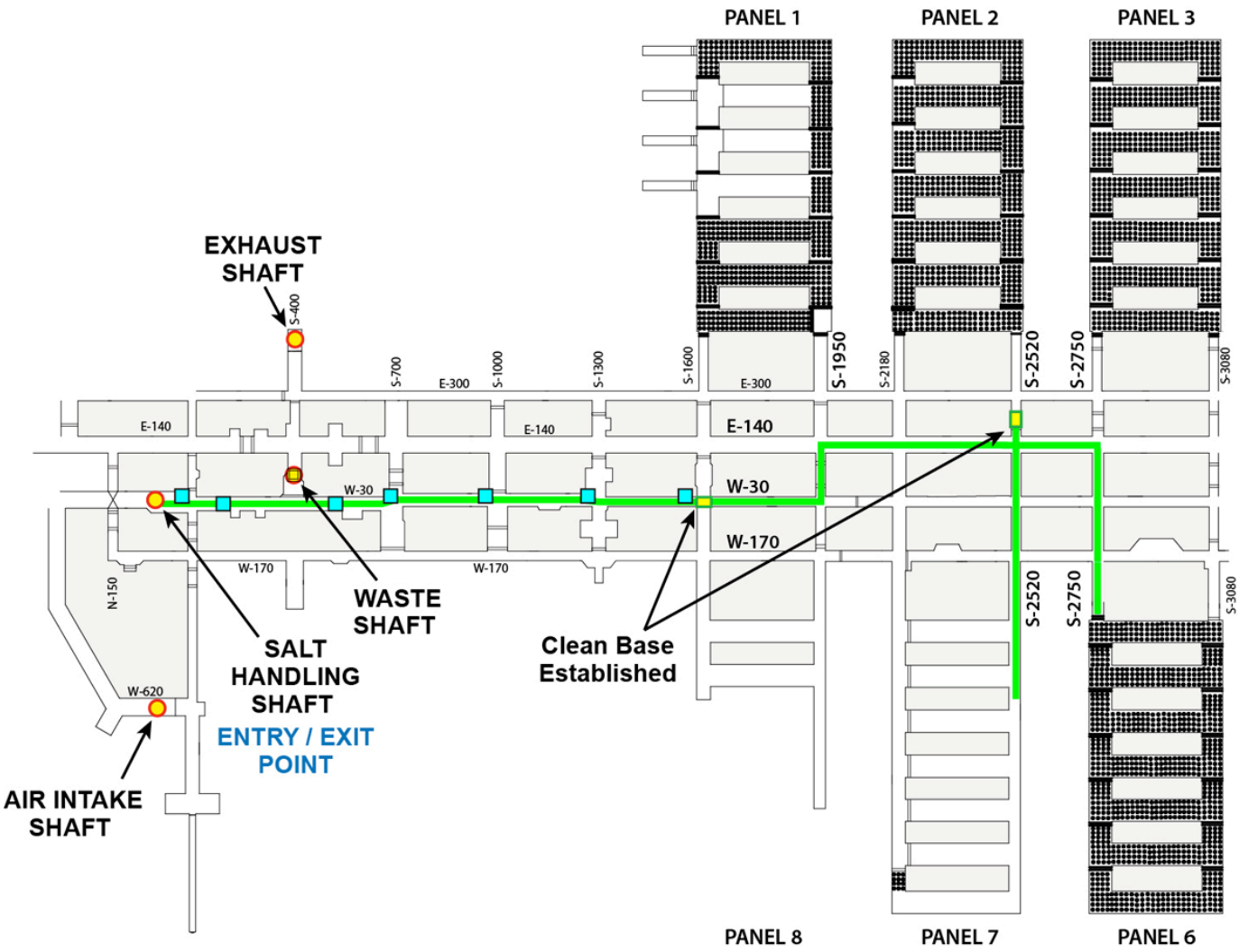
In September 2013, waste handling crews began placing canisters of remote-handled transuranic into 18-foot deep boreholes in the wall of Room 7 of Panel 7, which was the first room to receive waste in the panel. After remote-handled waste canisters are placed in the wall, a concrete plug is inserted to cover the hole. After a remote-handled waste borehole is filled, contact-handled waste containers are then stacked in columns on the disposal room floor in front of the boreholes. There are currently 18 remote-handled waste canisters and 258 contact-handled waste containers disposed in Panel 7.

Re-entry teams are working to identify the source of underground contamination. As has been previously noted, site experts believe that Panel 7, WIPP's active disposal panel, is the most likely source of contamination in the underground facility following the February 14 radiological release.

The teams have methodically worked their way toward Panels 6 and 7 from the Salt Handling Shaft (see map below). During the four manned entries into the underground facility completed to date, they have

installed continuous air monitors, established several safe bases of operation, and checked for air quality and contamination.

Last week, the teams determined there was no contamination source in the direction of Panel 6. During the next entry into the underground facility, the teams will work their way further into Panel 7. Depending on the radiological conditions, team members will evaluate the front rows of waste containers in Room 7.



Shown above is the expected re-entry route workers will follow to locate the source of radiological event in Room 7 of Panel 7.

Community Meetings Scheduled

April 23 - Carlsbad Mayor Dale Janway and DOE will co-host a meeting featuring updates on WIPP recovery activities. The meeting will be held Wednesday at 5:30 p.m. Location: Carlsbad City Council Chambers, 101 N. Halagueno Street. Live streaming of the weekly meetings can be seen at http://new.livestream.com/rrv/.