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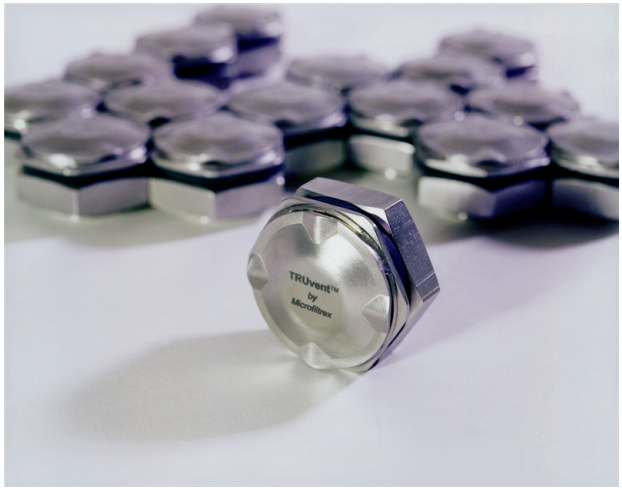
WIPP UPDATE: May 13, 2014

Venting of all waste containers is required before disposal at WIPP

WIPP is required to vent the transuranic waste containers destined for disposal at the facility to prevent buildup of hydrogen or volatile organic compound gas in the container. The containers are constantly vented from the time they are filled with waste.

To vent the containers, a specialized filter that traps radioactive particles while allowing gases to diffuse is inserted. The filter resembles a small threaded cap with tiny holes (see image below) that slowly releases gas. Any containers that are not in good condition for installing a vent hole and filter will be repackaged. The amount of gas released does not pose a health risk to workers.

Underground air monitors are also located near disposal rooms to test for volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that might be vented from waste containers. VOCs are chemicals used in the manufacturing process. "Volatile" means that these chemicals evaporate or can easily get into the air at room temperature. "Organic" means these chemicals are carbon based. There is an additional VOC monitor downstream in Station A that tests air quality emissions from the repository.



Underground Ventilation System filters still functioning well

Planning continues on the replacement of filters in the Underground Ventilation System at WIPP. Differential pressure and radiological and contamination monitoring show the filter system is still performing as designed. WIPP employees are expected to make additional entries into the underground facility prior to filter replacements. As a safety precaution, no entries can be made while the filter replacement is in progress.

Equipment to support the filter change-out arrived at WIPP last week from the Savannah River Site (SRS) in Aiken, South Carolina. SRS is providing equipment and personnel to assist with the filter change out since the activity has never been performed at WIPP. Prior to the February 14 radiological event, the filter banks had never been used, except during preventative maintenance evolutions.

Community Meetings Scheduled

May 15 – The City of Carlsbad and DOE will co-host its weekly meeting featuring updates on WIPP recovery activities. The meeting is scheduled Thursday 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/.

May 20 – A WIPP Recovery update will be provided at the Economic Development Corporation of Lea County Annual Meeting. The update, which will be provided by a member of the NWP Communications team, is scheduled for 11:30 a.m. Location: Hobbs Country Club, 5001 W. Carlsbad Highway.