

A weekly e-newsletter for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant team

WIPP employee reports from Iraq

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By the Numbers

Shipments scheduled to arrive at WIPP week of **5/2/04 - 5/8/04: 34**

Total shipments received at WIPP: **2,529**

Total volume disposed at WIPP: **19,711 m³**

FY04 Performance Metrics

Former WTS employee Ricardo Sanchez left WIPP in February to join the Washington Group International organization in Iraq. Sanchez says he exchanged life in the New Mexico desert for a life in the Iraqi desert. But that's where the similarities end.

To begin with, the Army base Ricardo and fellow contractors call home experiences mortar shelling on a regular basis. A second difference: at WIPP safety is priority one, in Iraq, **security** and safety are top priorities. At WIPP, employees are asked to watch their vehicle speed. In Iraq speed is safety. Sanchez explains, "When we travel, our drivers maintain a speed of 90 miles per hour until we reach our destination. We wear helmets and body armor. Because of the danger, travel off-base is authorized only on an as-needed basis."

The focus of Washington Group projects in Iraq is the repair and replacement of transmission lines between Bayji and Baghdad and Haditha Dam and Baghdad; and the augmentation and repair of power generators at Bayji, Dibis, Mosul and Mullah Abdullah.

Though news reports of contractor murders are troubling to Sanchez, his colleagues and their families, "There is a lot

more going on in Iraq than what is portrayed in the news broadcasts," he says. "The majority of the population supports our efforts on their behalf."

So why did Sanchez choose to work in Iraq? "I took the job because I feel the work is very important. The United States promised the people of Iraq and other world nations that we would rebuild. My colleagues and I are fulfilling that promise as we help to improve the lives of the Iraqi people."

Sanchez continues, "I went because I believe in the job. I stay because I work with some really phenomenal people. Everyone has demonstrated strong work ethics and high personal standards. We are a close-knit community though we come from different parts of the world."

The payoff for the danger and isolation of this job assignment is the experience of a lifetime, according to Sanchez. "One day I was working with team members from Korea and Turkey, and I realized that I was surrounded by and working with people from across the world. It was incredible. That's the best part of my experience there."



First: Celebrating success at Bayji. **Second:** Ricardo (second from left) and friends suit up for travel.

Third: One of Saddam's palaces in Baghdad.

Fourth: Ricardo points to mortar round damage from fragments.



CEMRC expands capabilities

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Up until this month, WIPP air sampling canisters, used to collect and sample repository air for volatile organic compound (VOCs), were shipped to an out-of-state laboratory for analysis. Now, the Carlsbad Environmental Monitoring and Research Center (CEMRC) will keep those dollars here in Carlsbad.

A division of New Mexico State University, CEMRC was established in 1991 to develop and implement an independent health and environmental monitoring program near WIPP. DOE provided grant funds for the construction and operation of CEMRC. That funding source is now changing to subcontract dollars, which will allow CEMRC an opportunity to apply its capabilities directly to the WIPP mission, plus develop capabilities for services that are currently outsourced by WIPP.

The ability to analyze VOCs in air sampling canisters is CEMRC's latest accomplishment. To meet requirements of its state-issued RCRA permit, WIPP routinely measures VOCs in the repository. According to Candice Jierree, WTS

senior technical consultant, "CEMRC developed VOC testing capabilities and successfully completed quality audits. CEMRC is now on the WTS quality suppliers list for VOC analyses."

The California subcontractor that provides these services will be phased out and CEMRC will soon begin processing the canisters. WTS generates over 340 canisters for analysis each year.

Asked about the transition, Deborah Moir, CEMRC interim director, said, "We are delighted with the decision by WTS to have CEMRC perform VOC analyses, and we look forward to future opportunities to expand our relationship with WTS and WIPP."

CEMRC plans to expand its services even further this fiscal year and next with the addition of RCRA metal and organics analysis capabilities. The Center will continue to provide whole body counting and environmental monitoring support to WTS. The initiatives are part of a CEMRC business plan to become a vendor of choice for numerous customers, including WTS.

VOCs
Gas emitted from the use or decay of organic chemicals such as solvents and paints. Most WIPP waste streams are TRU mixed waste: transuranic waste that contains hazardous constituents.

Another site - *legacy clean*

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On April 28, a small number of DOE Environmental Management (EM) legacy waste drums were transported to temporary storage at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) – a first stop en route to permanent disposal at WIPP. The inter-site shipment, which originated at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL), is part of EM’s mission to clean up TRU legacy wastes from small-quantity sites around the nation.

Successful completion of this shipment marked yet another milestone for DOE, the cleanup of EM TRU legacy waste from LBNL. The drums will be certified for disposal at LLNL under the Centralized Characterization Program (See March 15, 2004, edition of *TRU TeamWorks*). The waste is expected to be shipped to WIPP later this summer.

Although a small shipment that traveled but 40 miles, many organizations and agencies were involved in its coordination and planning. Among those organizations and agencies were the National Nuclear Security Administration, California Energy Commission, California Highway Patrol, CBFO, WTS, LBNL, LLNL and LANL-C.

Kim Jackson, WTS transportation manager, was on-hand to oversee shipment activities. “The coordination among agencies was tremendous,” adds Jackson, “Everything went exactly as planned.”

“The completion of this shipment is evidence of DOE’s continued commitment to cleanup these facilities across the country.”

Panel 2 Utilization Plan

As WIPP operations progress, planning remains key to successful completion of Mine Operations activities. To that end, Operations personnel maintain a series of charts: a pie chart to illustrate weekly percent of mining completed, bar charts showing tons of salt removed and line graphs to depict mining trends. Projects and activities are managed using a variety of computerized planning tools.

To better synchronize waste handling and disposal, underground maintenance and mining activities, Ty Zimmerly, WTS senior engineer, produces the Panel 2 Utilization Plan below. This chart is an overview of disposal operations in Panel 2. The tiny

black circles (Rooms, 5, 6 and 7) represent disposed waste containers, while the color-coded grid work marks disposal areas to be filled. The dates show actual and planned emplacement rates. By cross-checking these, forecasts for specific activities such as room closure can be refined by WIPP planners.

"I began distributing the Panel 2 Utilization Plan shortly after Room 7 of Panel 1," says Zimmerly. "It's simply a tool to help people at all levels decide when to perform maintenance operations, move continuous air monitors, install brattice cloth, etc."

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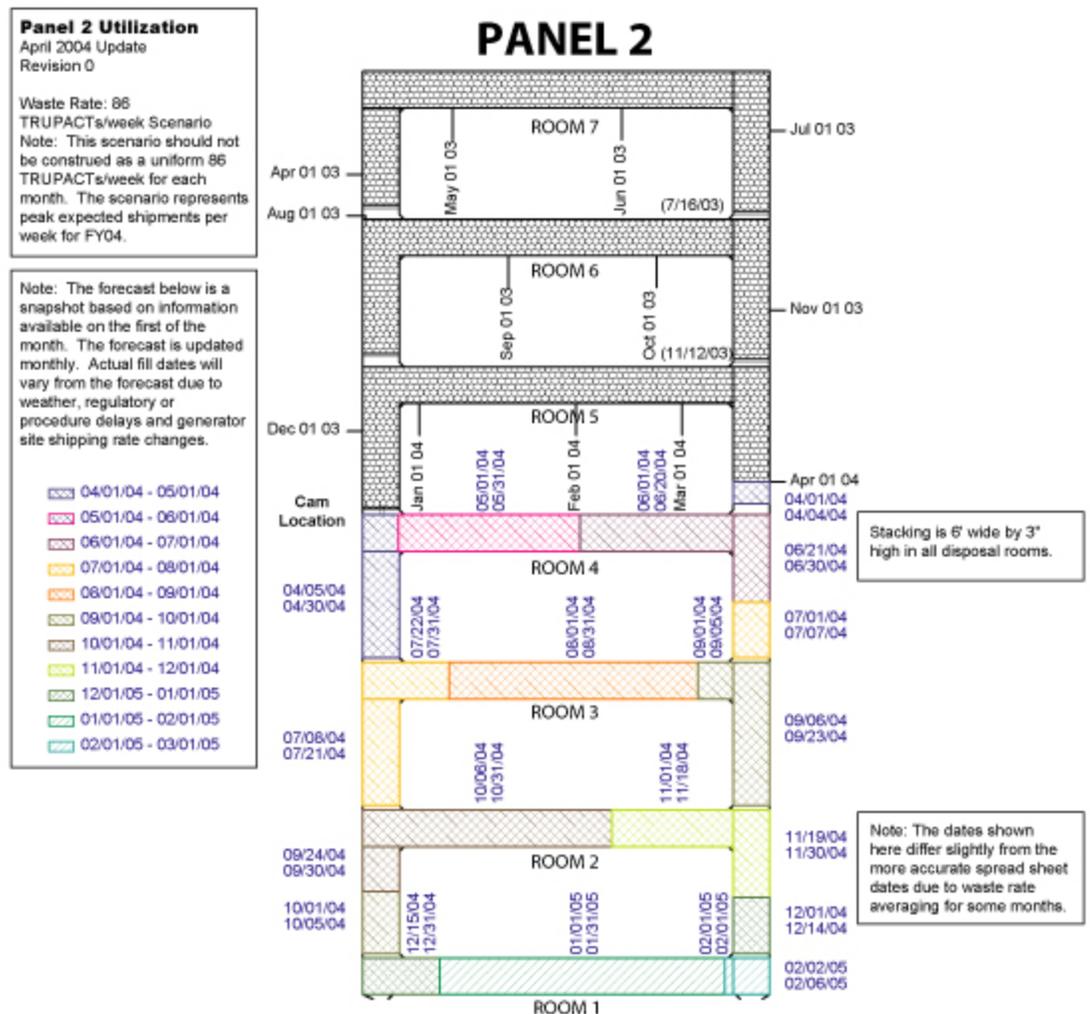
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Celebrating five years of safe disposal operations

A safety flashback

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This week site and town employees enjoyed lunchtime cookouts to celebrate five years of safe disposal operations. The journey began with a road trip. March 26, 1999, had barely begun and the sun had not yet risen when a truck carrying the first load of TRU waste arrived at WIPP from Los Alamos National Laboratory. It was 4 a.m. and a large crowd of people stood shivering as the truck's headlights broke through the darkness. A cheer went up for WIPP's first safe arrival.

Now fast forward five years to March 26, 2004. Cheers continue to go up for WIPP safety: on the road, above ground and below the earth. More than 2,400 additional shipments arrived at WIPP, most with much less fanfare. The trucks traveled 2,486,299 miles hauling TRU waste, but nearly 5 million miles when you include the empty trips to sites to pick up the next load.

Above ground, WIPP employees unloaded a steadily increasing number of TRUPACT-IIs in preparation for waste disposal in the underground. At the end of five years, they had safely unloaded more than 6,000 TRUPACT-IIs.



Site employees enjoy a well-deserved celebration



CBFO manager R. Paul Detwiler takes a turn at the grill.

underground on two fronts. The first was in the area of disposal, where more than 19,000 cubic meters of TRU waste was disposed. This was accomplished with the disposal of over 49,000 waste drums, 2,600 standard waste boxes and 800 ten-drum overpacks.

The other safety front was in the area of mining. While waste was being disposed in Panel 1, miners carved out the disposal area of Panel 2.

And after Panel 1 was filled and disposal operations began in Panel 2, workers began to mine Panel 3 - all accomplished with no major injuries.

"Our safety culture at WIPP is consistently recognized," says Tom Ferguson, Industrial Safety & Hygiene manager. "We fly the Voluntary Protection Program flag above the site for a reason. Safety is the cornerstone of our mission at WIPP."

The safe journey continues as we look to the next five years and beyond.



WTS general manager Steve Warren keeps his cool when the heat is on.

Questions and answers about the WIPP FORM

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WTS introduced the new Issues Management Program and the WIPP FORM early this year. As with any new program, uncertainty about the proper use of the WIPP FORM may exist among managers and employees. Here are some questions and answers about this important process.



When is it necessary to submit a WIPP FORM?

Submission of the form initiates the corrective action process, so it is **required** for:

- Conditions adverse to quality,
- Audit/assessment findings,
- Potentially reportable incidents,
- Potential Price-Anderson related issues
- Compliance failures
- Near-misses
- Other safety issues

It may also be submitted for questions, suggestions for improvement, or for coordinated review of new management or department initiatives.

Should I continue to discuss issues with my manager first?

Yes, and your manager is required to sign the WIPP FORM. The manager is held accountable for ensuring appropriate mitigating actions have been taken and documented.

Who should initiate the form, my manager or me?

If you are aware of an issue, you have a responsibility to submit a WIPP FORM. When an incident occurs that may involve several different personnel or organizations, the cognizant manager for immediate mitigating actions is responsible for submittal of a WIPP FORM.

What if I just want to suggest an improvement to a process?

The WIPP FORM is the way to submit a process improvement suggestion.

What if my manager and I have already resolved my issue?

Submit the issue anyway so it can be used for trending and lessons learned, in case similar issues are occurring in other WIPP areas.

If the WIPP FORM is needed as the result of an event, when should it be submitted, and who is responsible?

It should be submitted as soon as the event is over by the manager that was cognizant over immediate mitigating actions since he/she is required to include documentation of the actions taken. Submittal initiates the formal documentation process proving mitigating actions and resolutions were taken to prevent recurrence and minimize the effects of the event.

So, if I'm in doubt as to when I should submit a form?

Submit it.

What is the benefit from submitting a WIPP FORM?

It initiates a process for effective long-term corrective actions, prompts resolution of issues at lower levels to prevent occurrences, ensures overall site compliance with regulatory requirements, enhances safety, and documents site resolutions for posterity.

Judicious use of express mail and Federal Express

WTS employees are reminded to assess the need for express mailings to determine if:

Judicious use of express mail can result in significant cost savings for the project. Contact Marty Gonzales at 234-3174 for more information.

- The document can be scanned as a PDF file and e-mailed instead of express mailed without creating an overly large e-mail file (e.g., a few scanned pages should create an easily deliverable file)
- Express mail is a “must have” or requirement

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Firearms safety fundraiser

The Cavern City Friends of the National Rifle Association will have a fundraiser Friday, May 7, 6:00 — 9:30 p.m. at the Civic Center on 4012 National Parks Highway. Proceeds will be used for firearm safety education, firearms training and hunter safety courses.

Tickets may be purchased at several locations in town, or you may call Dwayne Smith at 885-8256 after 5 p.m. for tickets and event information.

Cost for admittance includes dinner and lots of fun:

- \$25 single
- \$45 for couples
- \$15 for 12 and under

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Birthdays

Steve Kouba (WTS) - May 1
Brenda Buttrey (WTS) - May 2
Debra Medina (CTAC) - May 2
Lyndi Estrada (L&M) - May 3
Lois George (WTS) - May 5

Gary Scott arrives in Baghdad

Dr. Gary Scott, CBFO director of the National Border Technology Partnership Program, arrived in Iraq on April 20 to begin his duties as regional coordinator for the Ministry of Electricity. Scott was assigned to the Coalition Provisional Authority as part of the President's National Security Policy Directive No. 24 – a national call for specialists from executive branch agencies to support Coalition efforts.

In an e-mail to CBFO, Scott said his responsibilities include strategic planning, coordination for creation of a utility

commission and drafting a proposal for the organization that will set the new Iraqi government's energy policy. He

also said he was pleased to have taken over ongoing efforts that were well ahead of schedule, noting that the typical Provisional Authority workday was 14 hours. Look for updates on Scott's mission in Iraq in upcoming editions of *TRU TeamWorks*.



WIPP tour recounted on Web site

On February 19, 2004, representatives of the Academy of Certified Hazardous Materials Managers (ACHMM) Board visited WIPP for a facility tour. A write-up of the tour and its impact on the Board members is currently posted on the organization's Web page at www.achmm.org. Scroll down to Chapter Item: *Roadrunner Field Trip: A Most Excellent Underground Nuclear Adventure*.