

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

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By the Numbers

Shipments scheduled to arrive at WIPP week of 07/25/04 - 07/31/04:
22

Total shipments received at WIPP as of 07/21/04:
2,801

Total volume disposed at WIPP as of 07/21/04:
22,208 m³

WIPP Labs certified to perform emergency analyses for federal agencies

The WTS WIPP Laboratories section was recently certified to perform emergency analyses for the U.S.

Department of Commerce and other federal agencies in the event emergency laboratory services are needed. The agencies include the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and response organizations such as the Radiological Assistance Program and Nuclear Emergency Search team.



The WIPP Labs team. Sitting left to right: Ying-Hua Xue, Margie Kidwell and Ginny Whiteford. Standing: Okka Maung, Mansour Akbarzadeh, Ray Neuman and Joe Ortiz

To support homeland security efforts, the U.S. Commerce Department set out to identify U.S. analytical laboratories with the ability to provide radionuclide samples analyses within an eight-hour turnaround time. Candidate laboratories were identified through participation in an emergency exercise conducted by the National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST), an arm of the Commerce Department.

Noting that WTS WIPP Labs already participates in the NIST Intercomparison Radiochemistry Program, the WIPP program was asked to qualify to perform emergency work for Homeland Security and other federal agencies.

Mansour Akbarzadeh, WTS manager of WIPP Labs, indicated that the lab team was ready to respond to the call. On June 2, NIST sent acidified water samples and glass fiber air filters containing unknown quantities of radionuclides to test WIPP Labs capabilities. WIPP Labs was required to quantify radionuclides in the water and filter samples, meet the required turnaround time and deliver high-quality results.

Within eight hours, the results of the analyses were accepted by NIST; WIPP Labs succeeded in identifying gamma emitters in the samples (Co^{60} , Ba^{133} , Cs^{137} and Eu^{152}) and was granted two important certifications.

“The certifications are another way for us to provide maximum benefit to the nation as a government-funded laboratory,” says Akbarzadeh. “The certifications are an added assurance to WIPP stakeholders that our analyses are accurate and traceable.”

WIPP Labs participates in intercomparison programs several times a year to stay sharp. Most recently, it completed the 60th and final round of the DOE Environmental Measurements Laboratory Quality Assurance Program. This program provides test samples of water, vegetation, soil and air filters with unknown quantities of several radionuclides. WIPP Labs successfully identified and quantified all of them.



Permit modification request to create path forward for some tank wastes

Last year, the Department of Energy's "waste incidental to reprocessing" policy in DOE Order 435.1 garnered much attention in the ongoing debate over how best to clean up the nation's Cold War legacy waste. The focus of the debate involves waste stored in large underground tanks at DOE sites, including INEEL, Hanford and Savannah River. Some of this waste has been managed in the past as high-level waste.

In October 2003, New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson ordered New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) Secretary Ron Curry to amend WIPP's hazardous waste permit forbidding any "re-classified" waste from being disposed of at WIPP. NMED subsequently published an agency-initiated permit modification limiting waste eligible for disposal at WIPP to an inventory developed when the WIPP permit was originally issued.

NMED's agency-initiated permit modification would have had the unintended effect of prohibiting some mixed TRU waste that was neither formerly managed as high-level waste, nor stored in underground tanks. Some mixed TRU waste that has already been approved for disposal at WIPP and is currently being received at the facility would have been prohibited under the NMED permit modification.

In order to address DOE concerns regarding the unintended consequences of NMED's permit modification, DOE and NMED together petitioned the hearing officer to postpone the public hearing on NMED's agency-initiated permit modification. The hearing officer postponed the public hearing to allow WTS and DOE to submit their own permit modification request that would supplant the NMED permit modification. On July 2 WTS and DOE submitted a Class 2 permit modification request titled "Procedure for Consideration of Tank Waste."

Wille Most, WRES principal scientist, clarifies the intent of the request: "This modification would prohibit TRU mixed waste from tanks that has ever been managed as high-level waste unless it is approved for disposal through a Class 3 permit modification. Any subsequent permit modification seeking approval for disposal of such waste at WIPP would provide specific information on the waste and its origin and would involve stakeholder participation through the Class 3 process."

"The evaluation of candidate tank wastes will be made against the same criteria as current WIPP waste," Most continues. "This evaluation will ensure that the waste is compatible with other wastes and the repository."

Public information meetings on this proposed permit modification have been scheduled for Tuesday, August 10, from 5 - 7 p.m. at the Skeen-Whitlock Building in Carlsbad, NM. Two more meetings will be held on Thursday, August 12, from 2 - 4 p.m. and again from 6 - 8 p.m. at the Courtyard by Marriott in Santa Fe, NM. The 60-day public comment period began July 8.

Classification of Permit Modification Requests

Class 1: Small, insignificant information changes such as typographical errors, etc.

Class 2: Changes that are not highly impactful to the permit, such as minor changes to WAP.

Class 3: More significant changes, such as managing waste in a different way.

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WIPP shipping milestones

WIPP achieved two significant shipping milestones this month. Last week, Argonne National Laboratory-East (ANL-E) completed its final shipment of legacy CH-TRU waste to the WIPP site. The TRU-mixed waste payload of seven drums and one ten-drum overpack left Argonne, IL, around 7 p.m. on July 14 and arrived 30 hours later on July 16.

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Although ANL-E no longer has CH-TRU waste, the site continues to temporarily store RH-TRU wastes. Shipment of those wastes to WIPP are pending approval of a permit modification request submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department in June 2002.

The second July milestone was WIPP's receipt of the 2800th waste shipment. Rocky Flats sent the shipment on Tuesday, July 20, and it arrived in the early morning hours the following day.

Since WIPP opened, eight generator sites have shipped to the disposal site. Following is a breakdown of shipment numbers per site as of July 19:

- Argonne National Laboratory-East – 13
- Hanford – 102
- Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory – 624
- Los Alamos National Laboratory – 71
- Nevada Test Site – 7
- Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site – 1,566
- Savannah River Site – 410



Constructors moves mountains



A bulldozer works on the south side of the salt pile.

Rearranging a 40-foot high, 900,000-ton mound of compacted rock salt is a big job by any standard. But Constructors Inc. of Carlsbad is on target for completing the \$2.35 M job by year's end. Constructors began work on the WIPP salt pile last September, tackling the weather-hardened mound that had accumulated since mining operations began more than 20 years ago.

In recent years, WIPP hydrologists had noted a thin lens of shallow subsurface water forming beneath the WIPP site. The salty water is well above naturally occurring groundwater and poses no immediate regulatory compliance or operational problems for WIPP. Nonetheless, as a proactive measure, WIPP engineers designed a liner cover over the salt pile and a system of collection ditches and evaporative ponds to limit further infiltration of storm water run-off into the ground.

Project planners meet weekly to review ongoing construction activities and site traffic patterns that could impact work plans. Forty-five acres outside the site's chain-link security fence have been affected by the project.

WTS Project Manager Kent Aveson attributes project success to good communication. "A team of representatives from CBFO, Constructors Inc., Quality Assurance, Engineering, Construction Management and Environmental Compliance meets each week to gauge where we are and where we're going. We all understand what needs to be done, giving us an opportunity to find solutions to problems before we get to them."



The first load of topsoil is placed on the liner.

CBFO Facility Representative Don Galbraith says the careful planning has paid off: "There have been no lost work days or recordable injuries on this project," adding, "Effective use of team skills and talents has also contributed to this project's continuing success."



Workers line the salt pile.

The salt pile's new wedge-shaped crown was lined by 60 ml high-density polyethylene earlier this month – seven weeks ahead of schedule. Crews are topping it with soil, which will be seeded with native grasses. Constructors plans to complete the salt pile project in December.

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WIPP safety quietly rising as operations increase

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In March, WIPP celebrated five years of safe operation and now the project is nearing receipt of shipment number 3,000. But a more subtle success is also on the rise: **Safety.**

“Safety is our first priority,” emphasizes WTS General Manager Steve Warren. “Safety takes precedent over everything else, including schedule and budget. Our jobs and our livelihoods depend on everyone going home safely at the end of the day.”

WTS, WIPP’s management and operating contractor, measures safety with two main indicators: (1) days worked without a recordable injury and (2) the recordable case rate. These are based on the Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s (OSHA) definition of a recordable injury. OSHA defines a recordable injury as anything that goes beyond first aid. A few examples of injuries that would be recordable are those that would involve stitches, prescription medication, broken bones or restricted duty.

The first measure, days worked without a recordable injury, is straight forward. How many days have passed since the last recordable injury? Up until now, WTS’ average number of days without a recordable injury was 30.8 days. Day-by-day, WTS employees have surpassed that average, having now posted a record 175 days (as of publication) without a recordable injury.

The second measure is the recordable case rate, based on the number of injuries and the number of hours worked by employees. In 1999, the year WIPP first received waste, the WTS recordable case rate was 3.2. In that year, WIPP received 44 shipments. So far this year, WIPP has received more than 550 shipments, plus better safety rates. Rather than the case rate increasing, it has actually plummeted. As of June 30, WTS had a recordable case rate of only 0.7.

While numbers and circumstances will change from year to year, WTS has shown that working hard and working safely can occur at the same time.



Small acts can make big difference to pollution prevention

Can you identify what P2 stands for? What about E2? If you answered pollution prevention and energy efficiency, you are right! The two concepts go hand-in-hand, since reducing energy consumption reduces pollution.

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Ashley Urquidez, a TRU Staffing employee for WRES, puts paper into one of the many recycling bins at WIPP.

One P2 program we're all familiar with is recycling. WIPP has specific annual recycling goals. Recycling bins are distributed all around the WIPP Project for paper, aluminum cans and plastics. When discarding recyclable materials, it is important to sort them correctly to reduce unnecessary janitorial services and landfill disposal costs.

So what can you do to help increase P2/E2 awareness at WIPP? "Start little, but think big," says Celeste Marsh, P2 coordinator, Site Environmental Compliance. Here are a few ideas to get started that can have a big impact:

- Remember the **3 Rs** – **R**educe, **R**euse, **R**ecycle!
 - Reduce trashcan waste
 - Use fewer paper towels and napkins
 - Reuse trash can liners and disposables (plates, cups, utensils) rather than tossing after one use
 - Request reusable and recycled items to purchase
- Take pride in your workplace – place litter where it belongs
- Read WIPP environmental documents (including MP 1.14 and WP 02-EC.0)
- Turn off lights and workstations at the end of the day
- Use less water

And there's more good news for WIPP employees, you're not alone. Site Environmental Compliance will do its part by:

- Providing managers with P2/E2 awareness topics for staff meetings
- Using communication channels for P2/E2 awareness (e.g., TRU TeamWorks, Porcelain Press, Web pages, Safety Café, e-mail and hardcopy materials)
- Enhancing WIPP training curricula
- Improving guidance at recycling centers
- Assessing new opportunities to minimize waste, reuse and recycle.



Let's not rest on our laurels. A key component of WIPP's Environmental Management System is continual improvement. Let's continue to self-assess our efforts and implement continual improvement strategies as appropriate.

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E-mail address “wipp.carlsbad.nm.us” going away

The final phase of moving e-mail connectivity from the old firewall to the new firewall will take place July 30. This phase will involve shutting down the e-mail address: wipp.carlsbad.nm.us. After July 30, only e-mail addressed to wipp.ws (firstname.lastname@wipp.ws) will be accepted.

Employees, please note: If you receive postings from mailing lists, check to make sure that your wipp.ws address is being used. If you need assistance, contact Technical Support at Extension 7422.



WIPP organizations are invited to participate in the WIPP softball tournament

WTS is once again hosting a semi-annual softball tournament. The tournament will be held Friday, August 13 and Saturday, August 14, beginning at 4:45 p.m. daily. An afternoon start accommodates employees who must work that weekend.

Team captain names and team rosters must be submitted to tournament coordinator Raymond Anaya by close of business July 30. Captains will be provided rules and other information as soon as possible. No one under 17 years of age will be allowed to play in the tournament. All participants will receive a t-shirt, and prizes will be given for 1st- and 2nd-place teams. The tournament is limited to 16 teams, so submit your intent early.

Employees who would like to play and do not have a team, contact Raymond Anaya at Extension 8451 for team assignment.



Birthdays

Dave Kump (WTS) - July 12
Cecil Thomas (NCI) - July 23
Deanna Ybarra (WTS) - July 25
Koreen Guillermo (WRES) - July 28
Esther Najjar (WTS) - July 28

Colleen Navarrette (L&M) - July 29
Yolanda Navarrete (WTS) - July 30
Alberta Farmer (L&M) - August 1
Lisa Price (L&M) - August 3

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