

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

## Topic Links

Home  
Characterization News  
Transportation News  
Disposal News  
Safety News  
Working Smart  
Announcements  
Our Team

## Tools

Acronym List  
Archives  
Links  
WIPP Home Page

## Feedback

Contact us with [feedback](#) or submit your e-mail address for updates.

## By the Numbers

Transportation and disposal statistics are available on pages 3 and 4.

## Congressional delegates tour WIPP

**P**roject personnel were honored to host a group of distinguished visitors on a rare weekend tour that included Chairman David Hobson of the U.S. House of Representatives Energy and Water Development Appropriations subcommittee; Ambassador Linton Brooks, Under Secretary for Nuclear Security; Congressman Steve Pearce; Ines Triay, DOE-EM Deputy Chief Operating Officer, Susan Grant, DOE Chief Financial Officer and several state and city officials. CBFO Deputy Manager Lloyd Piper said it was apparent that the group “recognized the enthusiasm that the WIPP team has for the facility and the mission.”

The visitors viewed the surface waste handling facility before traveling underground to watch actual waste emplacement operations. At the conclusion of the tour, Chairman Hobson commented on the importance of the WIPP mission. “The cleanup of the DOE complex is important to the entire nation, and WIPP is performing a very responsible duty in a very responsible way.”

“Many WIPP groups worked to make Sunday’s visit a success,” notes Rebecca Walker, WTS Public Outreach manager. “The tour received outstanding support from Mine Engineering, Underground Operations, Security, Waste Handling Operations, Dosimetry and many other WTS groups. The tight schedule made it important that each element of the tour went exactly as planned. Employees who supported the visit performed their duties exceptionally well and with visible enthusiasm.”

**D**avid Reber, WTS deputy general manager, adds, “Our visitors were very impressed with the cleanliness of the facility, the professionalism of our employees and of the obvious commitment our team makes to safety.”

Following the tour of WIPP, Chairman Hobson, Ambassador Brooks and Congressman Pearce toured Avalon Dam before departing from the Carlsbad City Airport.



**Chairman Hobson (left) and Congressman Steve Pearce (right) were joined by state and local elected officials and DOE representatives on tour of the WIPP underground.**



## Know your acronyms

**D**o you know the difference between HSGS and HGA? Is a MOVER a company that will take your furniture from one house to another? If some “common” acronyms confuse you, you’re not alone. WIPP lingo is full of acronyms designed to shorten project vernacular. Think you’re an acronym ace? Test your knowledge against the thirteen characterization acronyms listed below.

### Topic Links

Home  
 Characterization News  
 Transportation News  
 Disposal News  
 Safety News  
 Working Smart  
 Announcements  
 Our Team

### Tools

Acronym List  
 Archives  
 Links  
 WIPP Home Page

### Feedback

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### Did you know?

*It takes approximately one hour to perform radiological measurements on a drum of waste using the HENC.*

**AK**  
**HENC**  
**HGA**  
**HSGS**  
**MLU**

**MOVER**  
**NDA**  
**NDE**  
**RTR**  
**VE**

**AK** – Acceptable **k**nowledge. Information about the processes that generate waste and the waste contents. This collection of information is used to support waste characterization and certification activities. AK is the basis for waste characterization. In other words, AK is OK.

**HENC** - High **e**fficiency **n**eutron **c**ounter. A radiation counter that measures the radiological properties of the waste inside waste containers. HENC counting is a NDA technique (see NDA below).

**HGA** – Headspace gas analysis. Analysis of an air sample taken from inside the waste container. HGA identifies the amount of volatile organic compounds inside the container. HGA is performed on HSGS (see HSGS below) samples.

**HSGS** – Headspace **g**as **s**ampling. A sampling procedure performed on waste containers. HSGS yields a sample of the air inside the headspace of a waste container. HSGS is followed by HGA.

**MLU** – Mobile **l**oading **u**nit. Mobile systems used to load waste into TRUPACT-II containers for shipment to WIPP. Skilled technicians operate the equipment under the direction of LANL/CB.

**MOVER** – Mobile **v**isual **e**xamination and **r**epackaging unit. A characterization unit that uses a glovebox to repack TRU waste drums. The MOVER is used to perform VE (see VE below).

**NDA** – Non-**d**estructive **a**ssay. Used to confirm the types and amounts of radioactive elements within the drum. NDA is a non-intrusive characterization technique that measures gamma rays and neutrons emanating from the container. The HENC performs NDA.

**NDE** – Non-**d**estructive **e**xamination. NDE uses X-rays and a video system to inspect waste container contents. RTR (see RTR below) is a NDE technique.

**RTR** – Real-time **r**adiography. An NDE technique that uses X-ray technology to scan waste containers to identify what is inside. Operators can verify the waste’s physical form, identify objects and ensure the absence of prohibited items.

**VE** - Visual **e**xamination. VE is considered an intrusive method of waste characterization because the waste is removed from its container. VE is routinely performed inside a glovebox or hot cell to confine airborne alpha particles. The MOVER is used to perform VE.

### Did you know?

*CCP personnel have certified over 8,000 drums for shipment to WIPP in FY04.*

## Best results gained when preparing for the worst

### Topic Links

Home  
 Characterization News  
 Transportation News  
 Disposal News  
 Safety News  
 Working Smart  
 Announcements  
 Our Team

### Tools

Acronym List  
 Archives  
 Links  
 WIPP Home Page

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### By the Numbers

Shipments scheduled to arrive at WIPP week of 10/03/04 - 10/09/04: **23**

INEEL - **6**  
 NTS - **2**  
 RFETS - **15**

(subject to change)

**3,014** total shipments received at WIPP as of 09/29/04

**W**ithout doubt, emergency planning and preparedness has received a lot more attention in recent years. In New Mexico, these efforts culminated at the 13<sup>th</sup> annual New Mexico Emergency Management Association’s annual conference titled: **Preparing for Tomorrow, Responding Today.**

The conference took place September 20-24, at the Acoma Conference Center near Grants and attracted a variety of representatives from local, state and federal organizations, including WIPP, who play a role in emergency management. Conference goers used the opportunity to meet other professionals – whom they may one day rely on – and to learn from one another’s experiences.

Bobby St. John, WTS Media Coordinator and member of WIPP’s IART and RAP teams said, “In an emergency, it’s important that we’re all on the same page.”

Throughout the week, speakers presented a variety of topics that ranged from planning and response to the importance of communication during an emergency. While emergency management discussions were broad-based, presenters focused on the all too real risk of terrorism. Some presenters elaborated on possible terrorist targets within New Mexico, such as the national laboratories, the state’s agricultural market and, yes, even WIPP.

Participants also tested their planning skills during full-scale tabletop exercises based on a postulated outbreak of avian flu. Attendees separated into three groups, each responsible for the development and subsequent staffing of an emergency operations center (EOC). St. John filled the role of Public Information Officer.

During the first day of the exercise, groups managed the event from a local or county level. The second day, state agencies were brought into play. On the third and final day, federal agencies were integrated into planning activities.

**T**hroughout the exercise, controllers would interject new scenario information, causing EOC managers and team members to adjust their decisions. Efforts revolved around sheltering people in place, setting up evacuation and triage centers, notifications to news media and other directives needed to respond to a major emergency.

At the end of each day, the groups joined to debrief and discuss both good and bad actions taken that day. Exercise controllers also provided feedback for positive and negative performances. Exercises, after all, are the optimal time to make mistakes and learn, not when the call to respond comes in.



**Emergency responders shared knowledge during the four-day conference held in Grants, N.M.**

## MgO: The guardian of the WIPP underground

### Topic Links

Home  
 Characterization News  
 Transportation News  
 Disposal News  
 Safety News  
 Working Smart  
 Announcements  
 Our Team

### Tools

Acronym List  
 Archives  
 Links  
 WIPP Home Page

### Feedback

Contact us with [feedback](#) or submit your e-mail address for updates.

### By the Numbers

Waste disposed in the WIPP underground as of 09/29/04:

- 55,754** waste drums
- 3,656** standard waste boxes
- 1,211** ten-drum overpacks
- 24,031** cubic meters

**S**cientists agree that the WIPP repository's natural barrier - a 2,000-foot thick layer of salt, free of fresh-flowing water and geologically stable - is ideal for final disposal of radioactive wastes. MgO is an added layer of assurance that radioactive elements will remain confined in the repository.

Thousands of years after access to the underground is sealed, MgO, or magnesium oxide, will serve as a guardian in WIPP's rock-salt stronghold.

MgO is the substance inside the "super sacks" that are placed with the waste in the underground. The chemical compound, which comes in the form of small granules, serves three primary purposes. MgO:

- Consumes carbon dioxide from the disposal room environment that may be created as disposed material degrades
- Reduces the ability of actinides to be dissolved in water and therefore carried out of the repository
- Absorbs moisture in the unlikely event that water would enter the salt formation



**Approximately 14,000 tons of magnesium oxide have been used in the WIPP underground to date.**

### Other uses of MgO

**Use of MgO is not limited to WIPP. In fact, other uses of the compound include the manufacture of abrasives, animal feed supplements, fertilizers, antacids, cosmetics, toothpaste and ointments.**

underground. Over the life of the project, it is estimated that between 78,000 and 85,000 tons will be used.

**T**he salt formation that the repository is mined in provides a natural barrier to the waste's escape. MgO is an engineered barrier, which provides added assurance that in unlikely circumstances, the repository will continue to perform as expected.

MgO is provided to WIPP through a contract with a private company. A new five-year contract is in the process of being bid on and awarded. It requires delivery of about 6,500 tons of MgO each year. To date, about 14,000 tons have been used in the WIPP

## Washington Group International ranks among nation's safest

### Topic Links

Home  
 Characterization News  
 Transportation News  
 Disposal News  
 Safety News  
 Working Smart  
 Announcements  
 Our Team

### Tools

Acronym List  
 Archives  
 Links  
 WIPP Home Page

### Feedback

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**I**s safety a genetic trait? In the corporate world, it just might be.



**Washington Group International**  
 Integrated Engineering, Construction, and Management Solutions

**Occupational Hazards, a safety, health and loss prevention magazine, has ranked Washington Group International, the parent company of Washington TRU Solutions (WTS), among America's 17 safest companies in 2004.**

Washington TRU Solutions General Manager Steve Warren said, "We are delighted that our corporation has been named to this elite group. WTS and the other divisions that make up our corporation are committed to safety, whether the job is radioactive waste management or heavy construction. We plan for safety at every stage of the project. It's the Washington Group way."

According to Warren, WTS has earned its fair share of safety awards as prime contractor at WIPP, "Next month we will celebrate 10 years as a Department of Energy Voluntary Protection Program "Star" site for demonstrating outstanding protection of employee safety and health – the first DOE contractor to achieve this milestone." WTS has also been named "Mine Operator of the Year" by the New Mexico Mining Association for 18 years in a row for its "outstanding safety performance" and consistent record of mining safety.

**T**he October issue of Occupational Hazards magazine will feature profiles of this year's 17 safest companies. Two of Washington Group's clients, Anheuser-Busch and Monsanto, were also named among the safest companies. Washington Group provides support services to these companies. Publisher Rob Howlett said, "'America's Safest Companies' is the most anticipated and most read article series in the safety industry." The 17 will also be highlighted in trade publications such as Industry Week, American Machinist, Welding and Fabrication and Logistics Today. The companies were recognized at an event in New Orleans earlier this month.

## WTS team presents IFMS findings, adopts best practices

### Topic Links

Home  
 Characterization News  
 Transportation News  
 Disposal News  
 Safety News  
 Working Smart  
 Announcements  
 Our Team

### Tools

Acronym List  
 Archives  
 Links  
 WIPP Home Page

### Feedback

Contact us with [feedback](#) or submit your e-mail address for updates.

**A**t WIPP, continuous improvement is . . . well, continuous. It's been just over a year since final installation of the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS) was completed. Yet in July 2004, a WTS task team set about evaluating financial practices related to the year-old system for improvement.

Paper, and lots of it, was the mainstay of WTS' accounting system prior to installation of the web-based IFMS in 2003. Before the IFMS, WTS' financial system had evolved into a constellation of modules whose interfaces required constant maintenance. Meanwhile cost account analysts, buyers, requisitioners and warehouse personnel were obliged to reconcile the diverse, module-generated reports to pay hundreds of WIPP vendors each month.

Though accounting folks had fine-tuned the process, PeopleSoft's IFMS system introduced a common platform, seamless integration between financial modules and much needed on-line convenience. Today, IFMS users can access real-time account information and drill down to purchase order source documents with the click of a mouse. The IFMS has clearly streamlined the way WTS does business.



### Team Findings

IFMS software, installed in three phases over an 18-month period, has a good track record, according to Leslie Beyer. Beyer, WTS program analyst and team lead, said, "The system performs well 98 percent of the time; there are exceptions. NCI has agreed to document those and report them to PeopleSoft's Global Support Center for resolution."

Backtracking through accounting processes, the team found that incorrect data entries, though few, caused most system errors. Transposed figures and faulty account numbers were shown to generate troublesome ripple effects throughout the process. To reduce input errors, team members will poll IFMS users to determine what types of information and additional training would be useful to them.

With the help of expert IFMS users, the team compiled software tips, best practices and little-known IFMS capabilities learned through system use. That information, along with user feedback and the team's findings, will be shared with requisitioners, buyers, cost account managers and other IFMS users in winter training sessions.

Beyer said the effort will only enhance a very effective financial system. "A system can only be as good as the data entered into it and how efficiently the system is used," she added.



**Topic Links**

Home  
Characterization News  
Transportation News  
Disposal News  
Safety News  
Working Smart  
Announcements  
Our Team

**Tools**

Acronym List  
Archives  
Links  
WIPP Home Page

**Feedback**

Contact us with [feedback](#) or submit your e-mail address for updates.



**Federal Express service changes**

Beginning Monday, October 4, 2004, there will be no Federal Express plane pickup service or Federal Express drop box at the Carlsbad Airport. Federal Express will still make deliveries to Carlsbad and pick up our express mail, however, all letters/packages will be trucked in and out of Carlsbad via Roswell.

In order for your letter/package to be ready for Federal Express to pick up, they need to be in the mail room at the SWB by 3 p.m. each day. Anything received after 3:30 p.m. may not be processed until the following day.

Please be advised that Federal Express will not guarantee next day delivery due to our remote location, therefore all Federal Express mail will be processed using the 2-day rate.

If you have any questions please contact Mike Fox, L&M, or Ann Morissette, WTS. Thank you for your cooperation. We are exploring other alternatives for overnight delivery and will keep you informed.

- A. Morissette, WTS



**Flu vaccine update**

WTS Health Services nursing professionals are asking for both patience and awareness regarding flu vaccinations.

Though magazines and newspapers persist in telling readers to get their flu shots early, all flu vaccine has been recalled by the Centers for Disease Control following the discovery of some contaminated lots. As a result, the flu vaccine is not presently available. The WIPP Health Services group expects to receive a shipment of the vaccine for WIPP employees around the middle of October. Though this receipt may seem late in the season, it will still allow plenty of time for immunity to build before the flu season starts, which is usually in December. Health Services will notify everyone when the vaccine arrives.

- VPP bulletin



**Blood drive set in October**

Mark your calendars and roll up your sleeves for the WIPP blood drives. The drives will be held in the Skeen-Whitlock Building and WIPP site auditoriums in October. The Skeen-Whitlock Building drive will take place on October 19 from 8 a.m. - 3 p.m. The site blood drive will follow on October 20 from 7 a.m. - 4 p.m. Employees may contact Mary Williams at Extension 8997 to set an appointment or for further information.

- M. Williams, WTS

**Topic Links**

- Home
- Characterization News
- Transportation News
- Disposal News
- Safety News
- Working Smart
- Announcements
- Our Team

**Tools**

- Acronym List
- Archives
- Links
- WIPP Home Page

**Feedback**

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**Birthdays**

**Paul Gilbert (NCI)** - October 3  
**Don George (Stoller)** - October 4  
**Phil Porter (WTS)** - October 5  
**Shelley Jensen (WTS)** - October 7  
**Sheila Lott (WTS)** - October 7

**Janice Mashaw (WTS)** - October 9  
**Mark Edwards (WTS)** - October 11  
**Mary Helen Hernandez (L&M)** - October 12  
**Randy Steger (CTAC)** - October 12



**Company picnic was fun for all**

The WTS, L&M, NCI, SFPS and WRES combined company picnic, held September 25, was a huge success, with over 600 employees and their family members attending in spite of the rainy weather. Thirty-seven adult door prizes and 22 children's door prizes were awarded. Below are the names of the lucky winners:

Mobile DVD player - Shari Cullum  
 Garden set - Mark Dziamski  
 XM stereo receiver - Mike Bryant  
 Coca-Cola swing - Joe Bealler  
 26" bike - Jose Legaretta  
 Fountain - Jack Coleman  
 CD changer boom box - Amy Methola  
 DVD player - Richard Marshall  
 DVD player - Russ Stroble  
 MP3 player - John Jackson

MP3 player - Subhash Sethi  
 MP3 player - Joe Ortiz  
 Digital camera - Tim Boswell  
 Computer desk - George Alva  
 120 quart ice chest - Steve Offner  
 70 quart ice chest - Mary Helen Hernandez  
 Be Ready kit - Curtis Wynne  
 Swimming pool - Jessica Mireles  
 Canopy - John Angelis  
 CD-freshener player - Sharleen Strong

A special thanks to all employees who helped to set up and take down picnic equipment. Don't forget to mark your calendars with the dates for the Christmas parties in December. The adult party will be held Saturday, December 4, and the children's party on Saturday, December 11.



**Chavez named volunteer of the month**

**Art Chavez (WRES)** has been named the VistaCare Hospice volunteer of the month for September. Art has been a VistaCare volunteer since October 2003. According to the VistaCare announcement, Art "not only visits with patients for companionship and support but also helps those unable to help themselves with household chores."

Congratulations and kudos to Art for sharing his time with the patients and staff at VistaCare.