TRU TeamWorks

January 14, 2009

WIPP Quick Facts
(As of 1-13-09)

7,068
Shipments received since opening
(6,873 CH and 195 RH)

57,873
Cubic meters of waste disposed
(57,790 CH and 83 RH)

108,188
Containers disposed in the underground
(107,993 CH and 195 RH)

WIPP radiological expert helps prep for the inauguration

Ron Macaluso will be in Washington for the presidential inauguration, but unfortunately it will be all work and no play. Macaluso, who works in WTS External Emergency Management, will be traveling to the nation's capital representing the WIPP Radiological Assistance Program (RAP) team. His job: to help establish radiological baselines in the areas where inaugural activities will take place.

RAP team members from around the country are often called upon to perform radiological surveys at venues and outdoor areas where large events are hosted. A baseline measurement of normal background radioactivity allows law enforcement agencies to identify significant increases in radioactivity levels caused by a radiological event. These high-visibility events are not limited to government functions and include major sporting events, such as the Super Bowl and the World Series.

WIPP RAP team members have assisted in a number of past events, including last year's Super Bowl in Phoenix, AZ. But this is the first time anyone from WIPP has been involved in a presidential inauguration. The swearing-in ceremony for President-elect Obama is expected to attract a huge crowd in the National Mall between the Capitol Building and the Lincoln Memorial.

"The work is challenging," said Macaluso. "We [RAP team members] typically work 12- to 14-hour days to prepare for such an event. And I expect the scale of this effort to be significantly larger than what I have worked on in the past."

Macaluso's efforts won't earn him a prime spot at the inaugural ceremony. RAP team members will be staged at an alternate location, ready to respond if a radiological emergency requires their expertise.

The National Nuclear Security Administration's RAP is a first-response resource for assessing emergency situations and advising decision-makers on what steps could be taken to evaluate and minimize the hazards of a radiological emergency. The nation is divided into eight regions and each has at least one RAP team. WIPP is in Region 4, which includes Arizona, New Mexico, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. Other teams in the region are based at Los Alamos National Laboratory, Sandia National Laboratories and Pantex.

Team members are trained to identify and minimize risks to people, property and the environment associated with hazards in the event of a radiological emergency.

Millions of people around the world are expected to watch the inauguration on January 20, but the enormous effort put forth by federal, state and local agencies to safeguard the event will be largely unnoticeable.

Outage nearing completion

WIPP's extended maintenance outage is drawing to a close, with just about a week remaining. In anticipation of disposal operations resuming, five shipments of TRU waste were received at WIPP last week. Above, WTS employee Randy Wilson tightens a wall bolt in the E140 waste transportation route.

WIPP Laboratories reaching out beyond WIPP

WIPP Laboratories wants to expand its client base and to do that, its place in the URS Corporation structure has changed. As of January 1, eight WIPP Laboratories made a transition from URS Washington TRU Solutions to URS Washington Safety Management Solutions (WSMS).

With this change, the laboratory can expand the scope of the radiochemistry services it provides by doing similar work for other nuclear sites around the country. WIPP Laboratories had previously only provided support to WIPP through the WTS contract.

Interested in WIPP?

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WIPP Laboratories staff are shown above. Back row: Corey White, Joe Fraire, Okka Maung, Whitney White, Ginny Whiteford. Front row: Marie Kidwell, Ray Neuman, Mansour Akbarzadeh.

Mansour Akbarzadeh, manager for WIPP Laboratories, said the employees who are now part of WSMS will be able to perform laboratory analysis for non-DOE clients independently. He also said these employees were chosen to make this transition because they possess extensive expertise in radiochemistry and commercial laboratory operations.

“This gives WIPP Laboratories a better opportunity to share our expertise and to provide radio-analytical support to government and non-government groups outside the WIPP project,” Akbarzadeh said. “These employees have demonstrated their dedication and will continue to do so for WSMS in the future.”

WIPP Laboratories and its eight employees will continue to operate at its current location at the Carlsbad Environmental Monitoring and Research Center, which is run by New Mexico State University.

WSMS was founded in 1997, primarily providing services for the Savannah River Site, but it steadily grew as a company, and now supports over 70 nuclear and non-nuclear facilities at 20 DOE sites. Under URS, WSMS is headquartered in Aiken, South Carolina, and has a regional office in Albuquerque that will support the new WSMS employees.

WIPP has direct access to emergency medical care

No one wants to have a medical emergency. But if you do, hope that Tony Alston is nearby. Alston works for Washington TRU Solutions in the Retrieval, Characterization and Transportation Department, but it was his background as a certified Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) that recently saved the day.

An employee at WIPP’s in-town office facility recently needed emergency medical attention. Not only was Alston able to render aid until an ambulance arrived, but he also made the right notifications so emergency responders were able to quickly access the building.

EMTs Tony Alston (left) and Ken Urquidez at the Skeen-Whitlock Building Health Services Clinic.

“Tony did everything right,” says WIPP registered nurse, Anita Self. “We are fortunate to have EMTs at the site and in town who are able to provide what amounts to life-saving care.”

It’s not the first time Alston has come to the aid of fellow employees over the years and it’s not uncommon to see him briskly leaving the building. Alston is a member of the Joel Volunteer Fire Department where he’s been serving the community for more than 14 years as a firefighter and 19 years as an EMT.

Alston's perspective is similar to that of other emergency responders. There's no expectation of compensation, fame, recognition, thanks or even praise.

"I do it because there is a purpose for it," says Alston. "And the purpose is to help someone else."

Whether working at the site or in town, the WIPP work force has access to emergency medical care. The site has a strong staff of nurses, EMTs and even its own ambulance and fire truck available for both on-site and off-site emergencies. In 2008, WIPP emergency teams responded to 38 off-site emergencies. Located in a remote area of the county, WIPP staff can often reach an accident scene much faster than responders from Carlsbad or Hobbs, N.M., thus saving lives. For immediate medical assistance on site, employees dial the Central Monitoring Room emergency number.

At WIPP's in-town facility, the emergency number to call for a medial emergency is 911. However, if available, Alston and fellow EMT Ken Urquidez can render aid until other emergency responders arrive. The two EMTs have taken an active role in the health and wellness of their fellow employees at the Skeen-Whitlock Building. In addition to their regular duties, they staff the building's Health Services Clinic on Monday mornings, providing blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol checks, as well as other basic services.