

WIPP Quick Facts (As of 11-20-08)

7,063

Shipments received since opening

57,849

Cubic meters of waste disposed

108,138

Containers disposed in the underground

At right, a WIPP employee installs a roof bolt in a newly mined area in the WIPP underground.
File photo.

WIPP sets schedule for facility upgrades



Beginning November 23, crews at WIPP will perform some of the most extensive facility upgrades to WIPP since its initial construction. The work includes at least six major projects on the surface and in the underground.

Many of WIPP's facilities were constructed or mined more than 25 years ago. While other work may also be performed, a summary of the major projects is as follows:

Thanksgiving wishes

We wish all employees and stakeholders a safe and happy Thanksgiving.

- ⌘ The ceiling in the area where waste arrives underground will be raised about five feet. Mining equipment will be used to cut away the rock salt and roof bolts will be installed. The rock salt at WIPP moves in to fill mined areas at an average rate of three inches per year. This process is commonly called salt creep. Roof bolting soon after mining is complete enhances safety and prolongs the life of the opening. Minimum ceiling height at WIPP is 13 feet. The added space will also provide more room for the safe operation of large equipment.
- ⌘ An overcast, which directs airflow over an existing passageway, will be constructed over the main drift that leads from the waste station to the disposal area. Airflow in the repository is separated into designated pathways that can be controlled to provide fresh air to all areas of the mine. Airflow is adjusted based on several factors, including the operation of diesel equipment and salt particles in the air while mining.
- ⌘ Ground control work will be conducted along the main waste transport route to address salt creep. Movement of rock salt in the underground is closely monitored and preventive maintenance is often performed to stabilize an area long before it becomes a safety issue. This work will also include the installation of roof bolts.
- ⌘ One of five exhaust fans that are integral to WIPP's ventilation system is to be renovated. The fans are capable of pulling 425,000 cubic feet per minute of air through the mine.
- ⌘ An electrical substation that provides power to approximately one quarter of the site will be upgraded. The work will enhance the electrical distribution system.
- ⌘ A grapple hoist used in the remote-handled transuranic waste disposal process will be replaced. The grapple hoist is used to load canisters of remote-handled transuranic waste into a facility cask for transport to its final disposal location and inserted into a pre-drilled borehole in the wall.

Although waste shipments to WIPP will be temporarily curtailed to accommodate

maintenance activities, projects have been prioritized to allow the resumption of shipments as early as possible. CBFO says it expects the work to be completed by January 20, 2009.

URS Board of Directors visits WIPP



The URS Board of Directors and other corporate officers pose underground at WIPP during their November 18 visit.

The Board of Directors for Washington TRU Solutions' parent company, URS Corporation, came to see WIPP first-hand. This was the first visit for the Board, whose November 2007 acquisition of Washington Group International helped place the company in a global leadership role for radioactive waste disposal.

Beyond WIPP, URS Corporation has seen significant success this year in obtaining more work in the waste disposal field. The URS team received preferred bidder status for work on the Sellafield Nuclear Complex in the United Kingdom. URS is also leading a team that DOE selected in October to manage the Yucca Mountain Project in Nevada.

WTS President and General Manager Farok Sharif and other members of the management team provided a briefing to the guests on arrival at the WIPP site. The group then headed underground, stopping first in Panel 4, Room 2 to see where contact-handled TRU waste is currently being disposed. Board members then observed the remote-handled TRU waste emplacement process in Panel 4. From there, the Board went to Panel 6 to see the status of current mining operations.

Prior to the Board's departure, WIPP Blue and Silver Mine Rescue team members presented URS Chairman and CEO Martin Koffel a trophy the teams had won in national competition.

Sal Golub, of the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Nuclear Energy, reviews information about the PEIS alternatives prior to a recent public hearing in Carlsbad, N.M.

DOE seeking public comments on GNEP



The DOE is in the midst of public hearings on the Draft Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP) Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS). The hearings are required by the National Environmental Policy Act and offer the public a forum to learn about the various alternatives analyzed in the document. DOE invites the public to submit comments on the alternatives analyzed in the draft PEIS so it can make an informed decision.

The GNEP program proposes a safe, secure, sustainable expansion of nuclear energy, both domestically and internationally. It aims to expand nuclear electricity production, while reducing the risk of nuclear proliferation and reducing the impacts associated with disposal of spent nuclear fuel. The document analyzes the impacts of making no changes (No Action Alternative) to current policy and five alternatives.

The current U.S. nuclear energy policy is the once through fuel cycle, where spent fuel is retrievably stored for the foreseeable future (sometimes referred to as the "open" fuel cycle). The alternatives analyzed in the draft PEIS include a number of reactor types, as well as the possibility of reprocessing spent nuclear fuels, which is referred to as the "closed" fuel cycle.

The public comment period ends on December 16. For more information about GNEP, the PEIS or how to provide comments, visit the GNEP Web site at www.gnep.energy.gov.

Destination Safety: Safety fair to raise awareness

WTS will celebrate its second safety fair of the year to promote safety awareness throughout the project.

"Safety knows no organizational boundaries," says Safety Awareness Committee Chair Bertha Cassingham. "Our safety culture at WIPP is strong and events like these reinforce the importance of safety to each of us."

The safety fair will be a two-day event. The first day will be December 10 at the WIPP site from 1:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. The fair will move to the Skeen-Whitlock Building in Carlsbad on December 11 from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. While learning more about the latest safety techniques, employees will enjoy food, visit safety booths and have a chance to win prizes. All WIPP employees are welcome to participate in safety fair activities.

Liftoff!



A portable building is lifted off a truck at the Pecos River Village in Carlsbad, N.M. The building will serve as the distribution point for the all-volunteer Blanket Brigade. The community service project is sponsored by WTS in support of the Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce Christmas on the Pecos event. Volunteers loan blankets to visitors as they board the boats to view a spectacular light show along the banks of the Pecos River. The project runs from Thanksgiving evening until New Year's Eve. WTS has sponsored the event for six previous seasons. Last year, volunteers made blankets available to more than 17,000 visitors.

Interested in WIPP?

If you would like to be notified when TRU TeamWorks is updated with the latest information about WIPP, send an e-mail message to TRUTeamWorks@wipp.ws.



The U.S. Department of Energy
Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

Please send comments and/or suggestions to: TRU TeamWorks

WIPP upgrades seismic monitoring equipment

If southeast New Mexico shakes, WIPP may be the first to know. Earthquakes in the region are rare, but scientists at WIPP have monitored seismic activity for many years. And now, upgraded seismic monitoring equipment makes the task even easier.

"This is the next generation of seismic monitors," says Jaci Davis of WTS Engineering. "Each monitor has two recorders with tri-axial sensors that measure movement in three-dimensional space."

Davis says the system is an accelerometer, not a seismograph. What's the difference?

"A seismograph measures vibrations in the ground," she says, "while an accelerometer measures actual ground movement." WIPP conducts seismic monitoring both on the surface and in the underground.

Seismically, WIPP is one of the quietest areas of the country. A rare 1995 earthquake near Alpine, Texas, was felt at WIPP, but was not significant enough to trigger alarm. Nonetheless, a team of mine engineers, geologists, maintenance, and safety personnel conducted a thorough facility inspection. No damage was found to the project's hoisting systems, shafts or surface and underground facilities.

The new equipment detects not only earthquakes, but also man-induced seismic events, which can sometimes be caused by area oil and gas extraction activities. For seismic events that are above a pre-determined level, the system can trigger an alarm in WIPP's Central Monitoring Room and in extreme cases could automatically close the Waste Handling Building ventilation dampers.

The upgraded system's greatest benefit may be ease of use. "The new system is much more user-friendly and runs on a modern operating system," said Jim Hollen, WTS Underground Services senior engineer.

Final implementation of the upgraded system was completed October 24.