

WIPP Facility Operates to Administrative Orders Issued By the New Mexico Environment Department

In February 2014, two unrelated events occurred underground at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant facility, resulting in off-normal facility conditions and the temporary suspension of transuranic waste disposal operations. On February 5, an underground salt-haul truck caught fire. Nine days later, a breached waste drum released airborne radiation when its contents produced a thermal reaction. [The waste drum, shipped by Los Alamos National Security, later was found to contain incompatible materials.](#)

Since that time, the WIPP facility has been operating to administrative orders issued by the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED). The three administrative orders are designed to protect human health and the environment while the facility is safely recovered. The orders address protective measures and assure that NMED receives timely information regarding the management of hazardous wastes currently stored on the surface or disposed underground at the WIPP facility.

The first administrative order, issued on February 27, 2014, extended storage times beyond those specified in the WIPP Hazardous Waste Facility Permit and authorized the use of surge storage for transuranic mixed waste. This was for waste that had been received at the WIPP facility but not yet disposed. In addition, the order allowed the use of the Remote-Handled Waste Bay for storage of site-derived waste resulting from cleanup and decontamination activities. The order requires reporting of certain information that describes facility conditions and contains some actions to be taken for safe operation and recovery. The Permittees submit the information to the NMED on a frequency directed by the NMED Secretary. The information is currently provided in a ~~monthly~~ quarterly report to the NMED. The required reports are posted on the Information Repository, [where they are available to the public.](#)

The second administrative order, issued on May 12, 2014, addresses Permit requirements for the inspection of underground equipment and monitoring. This order required the Permittees to develop and submit an *Underground Compliance Plan* and *Underground Derived Waste Storage Plan*. These plans have been submitted to the NMED and are posted on the Information Repository.

The third administrative order, issued May 20, 2014, required submittal of a *Waste Isolation Pilot Plant Nitrate Salt Bearing Waste Container Isolation Plan* to isolate disposed waste containers in underground Panel 6 and Panel 7, Room 7, from the same waste stream as the waste container identified as the source of the February 14, 2014 radiological release. This order also required regular updates on Plan implementation. The Plan and updated reports are posted to the Information Repository.

On December 6, 2014, the NMED issued an Administrative Compliance Order to the U.S. Department of Energy and Nuclear Waste Partnership LLC, citing 13 alleged violations of the WIPP Permit.

In April 2015, general principles of agreement were reached between the NMED Secretary, the Department of Energy and Nuclear Waste Partnership toward positive resolution of the administrative compliance order. [A settlement agreement and stipulated order was signed by the parties on January 22, 2016. In response to the settlement agreement, the Permittees submitted the Information Required by Paragraph 31 of the Settlement Agreement and Stipulated Final Order, Dated January 22, 2016, HWB 14-21 \(CO\) on March 18, 2016.](#)

For more information regarding [WIPP](#) Permit activities see the [WIPP Information Repository](#)