

U.S. Department of Energy  
Carlsbad Field Office  
Waste Isolation Pilot Plant  
P.O. Box 3090  
Carlsbad, New Mexico 88221

# DOENews

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### For Immediate Release

## **DOE to Hold Public Information Meetings On Requested Permit Modifications**

**CARLSBAD, N.M., March 15, 2001** -- The public is invited to comment on requested modifications to the Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). Submittal of the proposed modification request to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) begins a formal review process that includes a 60-day public comment period and public information meetings.

In its submittal, DOE requests five permit changes to modify conditions at the facility. The proposed modifications conform to industry standards for the handling of hazardous materials and would continue to protect the safety of the facility, its employees, and the public.

The first two requested changes would eliminate redundant and obsolete training requirements for firefighters and radiation control technicians. DOE proposes that training requirements for firefighters be changed to mirror both federal and state requirements. This change would not adversely affect the quality of training firefighters receive. A change in training requirements for radiation control technicians is also proposed. The technicians currently must be trained on two pieces of equipment no longer used in their job function.

**More**

The third request proposes moving certain procedures from Attachment D1 of the permit to the operating record. This would allow DOE to make administrative changes to the procedures without having to apply for permit modifications each time. By maintaining the procedures in the operating record, NMED could review and comment on them — and direct changes, if necessary — during any inspection.

DOE also proposes that 26 “hazardous waste numbers” be added to the list of chemical compounds covered by the permit. This refers to numbers assigned to chemical compounds by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to identify the compounds and the hazards associated with them, and would allow waste containing these compounds to be eligible for WIPP disposal. All of the additional chemical compounds have been found to be compatible with WIPP containers and acceptable in the repository. The additional compounds would not pose any risk to workers, public health, or the environment.

The final requested modification addresses the amount of time allowed to report groundwater data to NMED. The increase would be from 60 to 120 calendar days. This would allow adequate time for the sample to be analyzed, the data to be verified and validated, and the report developed and submitted to NMED.

Informational meetings are scheduled for April 17 in Hobbs and April 19 in Santa Fe. The Hobbs meeting will be held at the City of Hobbs Commission Chambers, 300 North Turner. The meeting will consist of two sessions — 3-5 p.m. and 6-8 p.m. The meeting in Santa Fe will take place at the Courtyard by Marriott, 3347 Cerrillos Road, also in two sessions — 3-5 p.m. and 6-8 p.m. Individuals attending the public information meetings will be provided envelopes addressed to NMED for use in submitting written comments. Written comments will be accepted through May 14.

**More**

All written comments should be sent to Mr. Steve Zappe, New Mexico Environment Department, 2044A Galisteo Street, Santa Fe, NM 87502. Mr. Zappe is also accepting comments by e-mail at [steve\\_zappe@nmenv.state.nm.us](mailto:steve_zappe@nmenv.state.nm.us), or he can be reached by telephone at (505) 827-1560, Extension 1013.

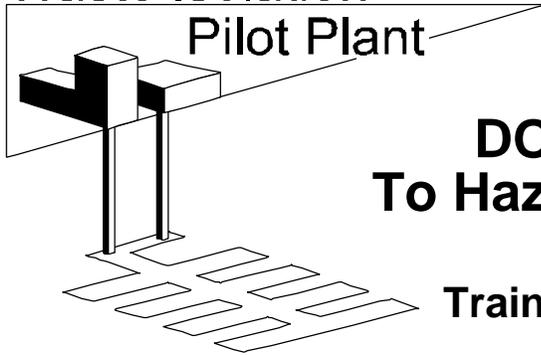
The public can obtain more information on the proposed permit modification by logging onto the WIPP Web site <http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us> and from the WIPP Information Center, 4021 National Parks Highway, Carlsbad or phone 1-800-336-WIPP (9477). Additionally, information on WIPP's compliance with the permit can be obtained from NMED.

WIPP, a cornerstone of the DOE's cleanup effort, is the nation's first repository for the permanent disposal of defense-generated transuranic radioactive waste left from the research and production of nuclear weapons.

Located in southeastern New Mexico, 26 miles east of Carlsbad, project facilities include disposal rooms excavated in an ancient, stable salt formation 2,150 feet (almost one-half mile) underground. Waste disposal operations began at WIPP March 26, 1999.

Transuranic waste consists of clothing, tools, rags, debris, residues, and other disposable items contaminated with radioactive elements, mostly plutonium.

**NOTE: See the attached fact sheets for additional details on these proposals.**



## **DOE Requests Modification To Hazardous Waste Facility Permit**

### **Training Requirements for Firefighters**

#### ***Background***

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has requested a modification to its Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in support of the DOE cleanup effort.

As part of a Class 2 modification request, DOE proposes changing the training requirements for firefighters to mirror federal regulations. The proposed change, which DOE submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) on March 8, 2001, would not adversely affect worker safety, public health or the environment. NMED issued the original permit in October 1999.

#### ***What is***

#### ***Proposed?***

The permit modification would change the total number of continuous training hours required in the permit to the level specified in the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and New Mexico State Fire Marshall guidelines. The change would reduce the required number of continuous training hours from eight per month to eight per quarter. DOE order 420.1 requires DOE facilities to comply with NFPA requirements.

#### ***What are the Benefits?***

Refresher training reiterates techniques currently used by firefighters. Quarterly training would continue to allow firefighters to stay up-to-date with changing equipment and techniques, without diminishing their ability to respond to emergencies.

**Comments**

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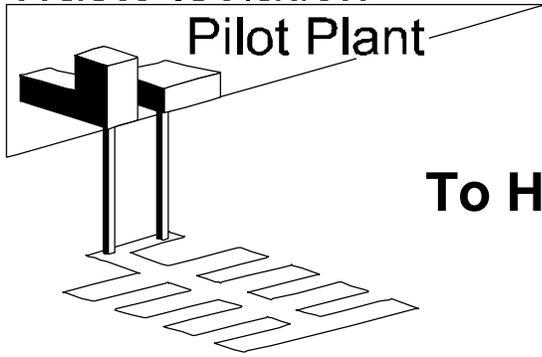
**For more  
Information**

For more information about transuranic waste shipments and procedures, or to be placed on the WIPP mailing list, call the WIPP Information Center at 1-800-336-WIPP (9477). You also may visit the WIPP Web site at <http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>. The permit modification may be viewed at the WIPP Information Center, or via the WIPP Web site.

If you prefer, write to:



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## DOE Requests Modification To Hazardous Waste Facility Permit

### Training Requirements for Radiation Control Technicians

#### **Background**

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has requested a modification to its Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) that would eliminate training requirements involving two pieces of equipment. Currently, the permit requires radiation control technicians be trained on two pieces of analytical equipment no longer in use.

As part of a Class 2 modification request, DOE proposes changing the training requirements for radiation control technicians. These proposed changes, which DOE submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) on March 8, 2001, would not adversely affect worker safety, public health or the environment. NMED issued the original permit in October 1999.

#### **What is**

#### **Proposed?**

DOE proposes elimination of unnecessary training requirements for radiation control technicians involving two pieces of equipment no longer used for monitoring activities by these personnel. This equipment, transferred to the Radiochemistry Laboratory at WIPP, includes:

- Liquid scintillation counting system
- Alpha and gamma spectroscopy system

Radiation control technicians do not use these two pieces of equipment. Therefore, training to use this equipment is not beneficial. The technicians would continue to train in-depth on all other pieces of equipment that pertain to their job function. Eliminating the training requirements on this equipment would not compromise the safety of these workers.

**Comments**

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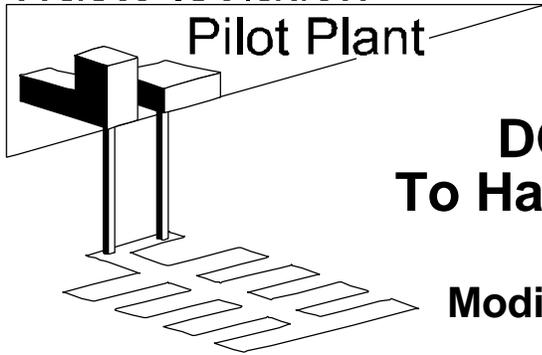
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## DOE Requests Modification To Hazardous Waste Facility Permit

### Modification of Procedure Requirements

#### **Background**

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has proposed a modification to its Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in support of the DOE cleanup effort. This is a Class 2 modification, since changes are proposed to the content of inspection schedules.

As part of the Class 2 modification request, DOE proposes replacing detailed inspection procedures specified in Attachment D1 with summaries and examples of inspection forms which show how required information is recorded. These proposed changes, which DOE submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) on March 8, 2001, would not adversely affect worker safety, public health or the environment. NMED issued the original permit in October 1999.

The movement of these procedures from the permit to the operating record would allow the WIPP facility to make administrative changes to inspection logs and forms without continuously modifying the existing permit.

#### **What is Proposed?**

Regulations require that an inspection schedule be developed and followed, and that the schedule identify the frequency of inspections and the types of problems to look for during the inspection (20.4.1.500 NMAC incorporating 40 CFR 264.15). When NMED formulated the WIPP permit, it included the detailed procedures and forms for inspections.

This has become an administrative burden since any minor change to a procedure requires a Class 1 modification to the permit. DOE requests the ability to return to the more conventional practice of having the current forms and procedures incorporated into the operating record. There would be no reduction in requirements, because DOE would still be mandated to conduct all required inspections, identify required items, and keep all resulting information in the operating record.

### **Comments**

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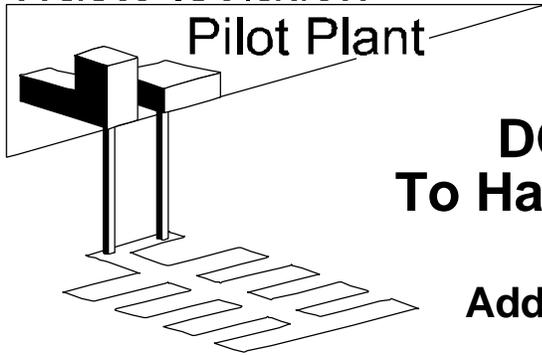
### **For more Information**

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## DOE Requests Modification To Hazardous Waste Facility Permit

### Addition of Hazardous Waste Numbers

#### **Background**

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has proposed a modification to its Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in support of the DOE cleanup effort.

As part of the Class 2 modification request, DOE proposes adding 26 new waste numbers to those already considered acceptable at WIPP. The proposed change, which DOE submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) on March 8, 2001, would not adversely affect worker safety, public health or the environment. NMED issued the original permit in October 1999.

Addition of the new waste numbers would be specific to waste containers in temporary storage at Los Alamos National Laboratory, the Idaho National Environmental and Engineering Laboratory, and the Savannah River Site.

#### **What is**

#### **Proposed?**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency assigns numbers to chemical compounds. These "hazardous waste numbers" identify the chemicals and the hazards associated with them. DOE proposes adding 26 new chemicals to its list of items acceptable in the underground repository. All of these compounds would be compatible with their containers and with the repository. The management of these additional compounds would not pose any additional risk to worker safety, public health or the environment.

**Comments**

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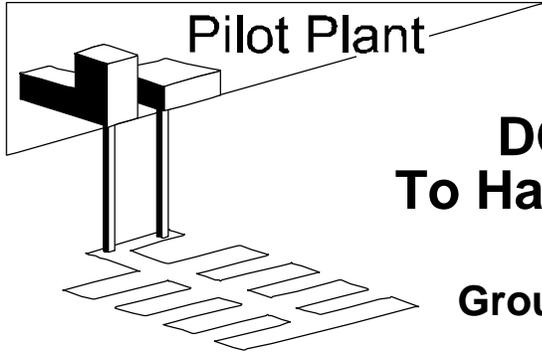
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## DOE Requests Modification To Hazardous Waste Facility Permit

### Groundwater Reporting Requirements

#### **Background**

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has proposed a modification to its Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in support of the DOE cleanup effort.

As part of the Class 2 modification request, DOE proposes increasing the time allotted to report groundwater sample data. This proposed change, which DOE submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) on March 8, 2001, would not adversely affect worker safety, public health or the environment. NMED issued the original permit in October 1999.

The increase in time would allow sufficient time to perform reliable chemical analyses of the groundwater samples, verify and validate the data, and formulate a report for submittal to NMED.

#### **What is**

#### **Proposed?**

DOE seeks to increase the number of calendar days from 60 to 120 for reporting the results of groundwater samples. The groundwater surrounding the WIPP facility has a very high salinity and total dissolved solids concentration. This combination makes it very difficult to analyze the chemical properties of those samples. Currently, the average is 109 days from the time the sample is received at the contract laboratory, until it is ready for presentation to NMED. DOE has tried to negate this problem by contacting numerous other laboratories, but to no avail. A permanent

extension in the number of days would be more appropriate than continuing to ask NMED for time extensions to allow for uncontrollable circumstances.

**Comments**

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