

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

DOENews

Media Contacts:

Dennis Hurtt
U.S. Department of Energy
Carlsbad Field Office
(505) 234-7327

Bobby St. John
Westinghouse TRU Solutions LLC
(505) 234-7348
(800) 493-9768
<http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>

For Immediate Release

DOE to Hold Public Information Meetings On Permit Modifications

CARLSBAD, N.M., May 8, 2001 – The public is invited to comment on two proposed modifications to the Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). Submittal of the proposed modifications 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 two separate public information meetings.

The proposed modifications would support more efficient operations and streamline the waste handling process at the WIPP facility. These changes will not adversely affect worker safety, public health or the environment.

The first requested modification contains revisions to an earlier request and reflects input from meetings with NMED officials and a review of written public comments. The original proposed modification was submitted to NMED December 7, 2000, and denied by NMED March 26, 2001. The revised modification request was submitted to NMED May 2, 2001.

In the revised modification request, DOE proposes to change requirements related to the existing permit's Drum Age Criteria (DAC). The current permit does not address the DAC for certain packaging configurations that are anticipated to be typical of transuranic (TRU) waste packages.

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The DAC determine how long containers of waste are required to sit after they are closed before headspace gas sampling can be performed. This sample must be taken before waste can be accepted at WIPP. The changes proposed to the permit will establish the DAC for those different packaging configurations.

In response to stakeholder and NMED comments on the original DAC proposal, DOE is proposing conservative DAC for waste containers in which packaging configurations cannot be determined. Additionally, DOE has clarified language to explain how DAC-related information will be recorded and to ensure waste generator/storage sites properly implement the correct DAC as they prepare waste for shipment to WIPP.

The second requested modification would allow for a limited increase in temporary surface storage capacity at WIPP to accommodate 10-drum overpacks. Currently, there are three designated temporary storage areas within the WIPP Waste Handling Building. The modification requests that the storage capacity for all three areas be increased by a total of 14 cubic meters (18.3 cubic yards). This would allow the storage space necessary for 10-drum overpacks. A 10-drum overpack is designed to accommodate ten 55-gallon drums, six 85-gallon drums, a standard waste box, or other waste items that are too large to fit in the previously mentioned containers. The 10-drum overpack is shipped inside of a TRUPACT-II and is emplaced directly into the WIPP underground disposal area without the need for repackaging.

Also included in this requested modification is the consolidation of container descriptions within the permit. The existing permit contains descriptions of containers in Modules III, IV, and in Attachments F and M1. The modification would allow the descriptions to be located in Attachment M1, and that attachment would then be referenced throughout the permit when a container description is necessary.

Informational meetings are scheduled for June 5 in Artesia and June 7 in Albuquerque. Individuals attending these public information meetings will be provided envelopes addressed to NMED for use in submitting written comments. Written comments will be accepted through July 6, 2001.

All written comments should be sent to Mr. Steve Zappe, New Mexico Environment Department, Hazardous Waste Bureau, 2905 Rodeo Park Drive, Building E, Santa Fe, NM 87502. Mr. Zappe is also accepting comments by e-mail at **steve_zappe@nmenv.state.nm.us**, or he can be reached by telephone at (505) 827-1560, Ext. 1013.

The Artesia informational meeting will consist of two sessions – from 3 to 5 p.m. and from 6 to 8 p.m. The Albuquerque meeting also includes two sessions – from 3 to 5 p.m. and from 6 to 8 p.m. The Artesia meeting will be at the City Council Chambers, 511 W. Texas. The Albuquerque meeting will be at the Courtyard by Marriott, 5151 Journal Center Blvd., NE.

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 or phone 1-800-336-WIPP (9477). If you have comments relative to this permit modification, and would like them addressed by the permittees, please submit them to Mr. Bobby St. John, P.O. Box 2078, Carlsbad, NM 88221 by June 29, 2001. 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.

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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.

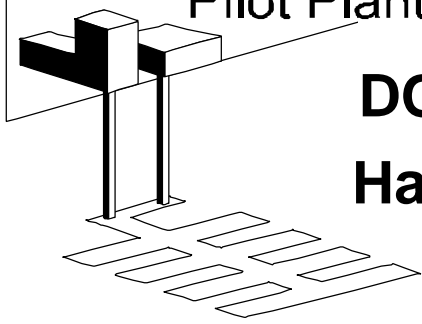
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NOTE: See the attached fact sheets for additional details on the proposals

Waste Isolation

Pilot Plant



DOE Proposes Modification to Hazardous Waste Facility Permit

Drum Age Criteria

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.

The original proposed modification was submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) December 7, 2000, and denied by NMED March 26, 2001. The revised modification request submitted to NMED May 2, 2001, will not adversely affect worker safety, human health, or the environment.

As part of a Class 2 permit modification request, DOE proposes to modify requirements for Drum Age Criteria (DAC). The current permit does not address certain packaging configurations anticipated to be typical of transuranic (TRU) waste packages. The DAC determine how long a drum of waste is required to sit idle prior to headspace gas sampling being performed. This sample is required for most waste containers to be accepted at WIPP. The changes proposed to the permit take into account additional expected packaging configurations to determine the approximate DAC (i.e., the amount of time the drums are required to sit before headspace gas sampling can be accomplished).

In response to stakeholder and NMED comments on the original DAC proposal, DOE has established a conservative DAC for waste containers in which packaging configurations cannot be determined. Additionally, DOE has clarified language to explain how DAC information will be recorded and to ensure waste generator/storage sites properly implement the correct DAC as they prepare waste for shipment to WIPP.

The permit requires that a headspace gas sample be obtained from each container prior to disposal at WIPP. To ensure that these samples represent the entire container, the permit specified a minimum number of days a container must sit after packaging before it can be sampled.

In determining the DAC, consideration must be given to the “number of layers of confinement” inside a container and the rate at which the gases pass through those confinement layers. In other words, a drum containing waste that is inside three plastic bags will have lower DAC (shorter period in idle storage) than a drum containing waste inside five plastic bags. In the event the number of layers of confinement cannot be determined, more conservative DAC are used to accommodate any such drums. This modification also clarifies procedures for recording information about the DAC.

The permit establishes that drum age must ensure that headspace gas has reached a 90 percent steady-state concentration within each layer of confinement. The DAC values in the current permit were established for five layers of plastic bags as a bounding condition for debris waste and two layers for homogeneous solids and soils and gravel. The permit did not consider other specific packaging configurations that occur in TRU waste containers.

What is Proposed?

In an effort to expedite the disposal of transuranic waste in a cost-effective and environmentally sound manner and to correct inconsistencies in the DAC in the permit, the DOE proposes the following:

- Modify the existing permit to include DAC values for specific waste packaging configurations for three different headspace gas sampling scenarios
- Eliminate an inconsistency within the permit when using the term “unvented rigid container greater than 4 liters”

In all cases the 90 percent of steady-state criterion is maintained to ensure that samples are representative.

DOE’s main priority at WIPP is to safely dispose of transuranic waste from U.S. defense activities in an expedient, cost-effective, and environmentally sound manner so that DOE facilities storing this waste can be cleaned up as quickly as possible.

Comments

Comments may be sent to Mr. Steve Zappe, New Mexico Environment Department, 2905 Rodeo Park Drive, Building E, Santa Fe, NM, 87505. They may also be e-mailed: steve_zappe@nmenv.state.nm.us, or faxed 505-827-1544. Only written comments will be accepted. A copy of the permit modification may be viewed or copied at the NMED offices of Mr. Steve Zappe.

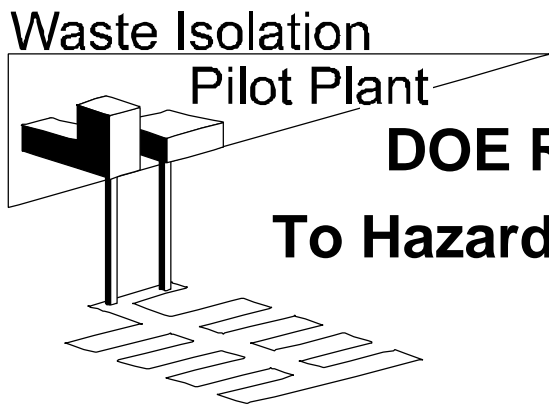
**For more
Information**

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>. If you have comments relative to this permit modification and would like them addressed by the permittees, please submit them to Mr. Bobby St. John, P.O. Box 2078, Carlsbad, NM 88221 by June 29, 2001.

If you prefer, write to:



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DOE Requests Modification To Hazardous Waste Facility Permit

Increase in Temporary Surface Storage Space And Consolidation of Container Description

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 a Class 2 permit modification request, DOE proposes to increase temporary surface storage in WIPP's Waste Handling Building to accommodate the container known as the 10-drum overpack and consolidate the descriptions of containers into one attachment to the permit. The proposed changes, which DOE submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) May 2, 2001, will not adversely affect worker safety, public health, or the environment. NMED issued the original permit in October 1999.

DOE's main priority at WIPP is to safely dispose of transuranic waste from U.S. defense activities in a safe, environmentally sound and cost-effective manner, while also allowing expeditious cleanup of DOE facilities storing the waste.

The 10-drum overpack is designed to accommodate ten 55-gallon drums, six 85-gallon drums, a standard waste box, or waste that is too large to fit in the previously mentioned containers. The 10-drum overpack is shipped inside of a TRUPACT-II and is emplaced directly into the WIPP underground disposal area.

What is Proposed?

DOE is proposing to increase the permitted temporary surface storage areas to accommodate 10-drum overpacks. This increase is 14.0 cubic meters (18.3 cubic yards). Currently, the 10-drum overpack can be stored in three locations within the Waste Handling Building. The current storage capacity is insufficient if all containers being stored are 10-drum overpacks. The total combined increase for all three areas will equal the 14 cubic meters (18.3 cubic yards).

DOE is also proposing to consolidate the descriptions of containers into one attachment to the Hazardous Waste Facility Permit. In the current permit, container descriptions are found in Modules III, IV, and Attachments F and M1. The modification would allow the descriptions to be consolidated in Attachment M1, and that attachment would then be referenced in all other sections requiring container descriptions.

Comments

Comments may be sent to Mr. Steve Zappe, New Mexico Environment Department, 2905 Rodeo Park Drive, Building E, Santa Fe, NM, 87505. They may also be e-mailed to **steve_zappe@nmenv.state.nm.us**, or faxed to 505-827-1544. Only written comments will be accepted. A copy of the permit modification may be viewed or copied at the NMED offices of Mr. Steve Zappe.

For more Information

For more information about transuranic waste shipments and procedures, contact 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>**. If you have comments relative to this permit modification and would like them addressed by the permittees, please submit them to Mr. Bobby St. John, P.O. Box 2078, Carlsbad, NM 88221 by June 29, 2001.

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