



## **DOE Proposes to Increase Aboveground Storage Capacity, Expand Storage Locations, and Duration of Storage**

### ***Summary and 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) that would support establishment of a centralized waste characterization facility at WIPP.

As part of a Class 2 modification request, DOE proposes to 1) increase aboveground storage capacity for transuranic radioactive waste by 25 percent, 2) remove the time limit for temporarily storing waste aboveground at WIPP, and 3) expand the capacity of storage areas within the WIPP Waste Handling Building. These proposed changes, which the DOE submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) on July 24, 2000, will not adversely affect worker safety, human health, or the environment. NMED issued the Permit in October 1999.

The DOE's main priority at WIPP is to safely dispose of transuranic waste from United States defense activities in an expedient, cost-effective and environmentally sound manner so that DOE facilities with this waste can be cleaned up as quickly as possible. The permit requires waste characterization prior to permanent disposal at WIPP. This presents a problem for some DOE sites that are storing only small quantities of transuranic waste and lack the needed characterization facilities.

### **What is Waste Characterization?**

Waste characterization is the process to identify and describe the physical, chemical, and radiological properties of transuranic waste. DOE uses this information to determine whether the waste meets regulatory requirements for disposal at WIPP.

To resolve this problem, DOE is proposing to locate a centralized waste characterization facility at WIPP. Under this proposal, waste would be transported directly to WIPP where it would be characterized for disposal.

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

In an effort to operate the WIPP facility in an environmentally sound and fiscally responsible manner, DOE proposes the following:

- Modify the existing Permit to increase aboveground storage capacity in the Waste Handling Building by 25 percent.

Under the current Permit, DOE is allowed to store 122 cubic meters of transuranic waste on site. An increase of 25 percent would allow DOE to temporarily store an additional 30.7 cubic meters of waste. Coupled with the increase in storage capacity will be an expansion of the storage areas within the Waste Handling Building to allow more effective waste management at WIPP.

- Remove the time limit for temporarily storing waste containers aboveground at WIPP before they are permanently disposed underground.

Under the current Permit, DOE is allowed to store waste containers on the surface for 60 days. This change will allow DOE to accept waste for characterization without impacting the receipt of waste for disposal from other DOE sites (e.g., Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site, Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory, and the Hanford Site).

### ***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). Or you may visit the WIPP Home Page at [www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us](http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us). If you prefer, write to:

WIPP Information Center  
U.S. Department of Energy  
Carlsbad Area Office  
P.O. Box 3090  
Carlsbad, NM 88221



U.S. Department of Energy  
Carlsbad Area Office  
The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant