

DOENews

Emergency Response Personnel Responding to Fire at WIPP

CARLSBAD, N.M., February 5, 2014, 8:50 p.m. – Emergency response teams are responding to a fire at the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP).

NEW INFORMATION

- WIPP's mine rescue team has re-entered the WIPP underground and confirmed that the underground salt haulage vehicle fire is extinguished
- The team also confirmed that the air in the underground is clear, meaning it is safe to breathe
- Three members of WIPP's mine rescue team made the first re-entry into the mine and verified quality of the air at the point of entry; two additional team members then joined them in the underground
- A second WIPP mine rescue team of five members remained on standby on the surface

Information Released at 2:44 p.m.

- Personnel who were transported to a local hospital for possible smoke inhalation have been released
- Officials at WIPP are working on a plan for safe re-entry to the WIPP underground
- No time frame has been determined for the plan to be approved and for actual re-entry to the mine
- Emergency response personnel at WIPP are trained to respond to a wide variety of emergencies

-More-

Information Released at 12:25 p.m.

- Shortly after 11 a.m., WIPP's Emergency Operations Center was activated
- An underground vehicle used to transport salt is on fire in the underground
- All underground personnel are accounted for and have been safely evacuated to the surface
- Powered ventilation to the underground has been suspended
- Multiple employees are being transported to a local hospital for potential smoke inhalation
- All waste handling operations are suspended
- There is no waste in the vicinity of the fire
- WIPP's mine rescue teams are being activated and one additional mine rescue team is on standby
- Access to the site is restricted
- A news conference will be held at 1:30 p.m. at the Skeen-Whitlock Building in Carlsbad at 4021 National Parks Highway

A Joint Information Center (JIC) has been established in Carlsbad, located at 4021 National Parks Highway, to provide emergency public information. Public inquiries can be made to the JIC from Carlsbad by calling (575) 234-7380 and (575) 234-7305 for media inquiries. If outside the local calling area, call 1-800-336-9477 for updated information.

Concerned residents can listen to their local radio stations to receive fast-breaking information announced by the JIC.

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

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

For more information about WIPP, call 1-800-336-9477, or visit the WIPP Web site at <http://www.wipp.energy.gov>.