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WIPP UPDATES: March 22, 2014

WIPP Employees Train for First Entry Underground since Release

Thirty-five WIPP employees are preparing for the first entry in the underground mine since the February 14 radiological release closed the mine and forced suspension of transuranic waste disposal operations. Team members are challenged with the working conditions of a mining environment compounded by radiological conditions, while fully suited in anti-contamination gear and oxygen supplied breathing units.

Extensive training since the event focuses on using the skills and knowledge of the employees to safely navigate the conditions in the WIPP underground, while protecting them from exposure to airborne radiation. All potential scenarios that might unfold during the re-entry process are being considered, planned for, and rehearsed to ensure the safety of the employees, and the success of the mission.

This week team members simulated the WIPP underground environment by practicing at Mosiac, a nearby Potash mine. The group suited in their personal protective equipment, including air-breathing units, for a two-hour walk underground.

The initial personnel entry into the mine, currently planned for early next week, will establish an operating camp near the Salt Handling Shaft, and ensure there is a safe secondary exit point available at the Air Intake Shaft. Follow-up entries will be geared toward establishing a safe path toward the suspected release site, and locating the source of the release, which will provide information for a plan to remediate the release source.

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Here Are Photos of the Potash Mine Training

Entry team members dress out in anti-contamination gear, with assistance from the WIPP Safety and Operations Department. The gear and the oxygen-supplied air breathing units will be important to keeping the workers safe as they traverse the WIPP underground environment.



Team members get final instructions from WIPP Safety and Operations personnel prior to beginning their underground training at the Potash mine.

Training inside the Mosaic Potash mine simulates the conditions workers will find in the WIPP underground. Here re-entry team members practice decontamination exercises during a recent two-hour stint underground.



Community Meetings Scheduled

March 25 – WIPP officials will update the Artesia City Council on WIPP recovery activities at 7:00 p.m.
Location: 511 W. Texas Ave., Artesia.