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WIPP UPDATE: July 6, 2016

Annual Exercise Tests WIPP Emergency Response Capabilities

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) recently held its annual full-scale exercise to demonstrate employees' overall capability to recognize, respond, and mitigate any emergency situation that might occur at WIPP.

On June 22, more than 100 external evaluators assessed the performance of WIPP Safety Management Programs at the day-long exercise, including a simulated underground fire and radiological release. Participants were evaluated on their ability to follow and implement plans and procedures and their overall response to simulated events. Post-exercise critiques identified activities that went well and areas where there are opportunities for improvement.



Several members of the WIPP Mine Rescue Team simulate rescuing two injured underground workers during last week's emergency exercise.

The exercise required the activation of the WIPP Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and Joint Information Center (JIC), and included involvement of WIPP's emergency responders in the field and various offsite agencies, allowing these organizations an opportunity to work together on a coordinated response.

Participating organizations included the DOE Headquarters Emergency Management Team, National Atmospheric Release Advisory Center, DOE Region IV Radiological Assistance Program Team (support request), New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management State EOC, Mine Safety and Health Administration, New Mexico State Mine EOC, Regional Emergency Dispatch Authority, Eddy County EOC and Office of Emergency Management, Lea County EOC and Office of Emergency Management, Carlsbad Fire Department, and Carlsbad Medical Center. Argonne National Laboratory's Center for Integrated Emergency Preparedness provided support for the Joint Information Center, including simulated media interest.

Many significant improvements have been made to the Emergency Response Organization to ensure that WIPP will be able to safely resume waste emplacement operations later this year.

Improvements include the new, state-of-the art EOC facility in Carlsbad, which was utilized during this exercise. An official After Action Report will be developed in the next few weeks that will highlight the strengths and areas for improvement in the WIPP response, as observed during the exercise, and recommend corrective actions for additional improvements.

Date for Next WIPP Town Hall Meeting - August 4

The City of Carlsbad and DOE co-host Town Hall meetings to provide updates on WIPP restart activities. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, August 4 at 5:30 p.m. Location: Carlsbad City Council Chambers, 101 N. Halagueno Street. WIPP Town Hall Meetings are live streamed at <http://new.livestream.com/rvv/>.