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WIPP UPDATE: September 17, 2015

WIPP Conducts Annual Full Scale Emergency Response Exercise

On September 16, the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) held its annual full-scale exercise to demonstrate and evaluate their overall capability to recognize, respond, contain and mitigate an emergency situation that might occur at WIPP. Exercise participants at the WIPP site were evaluated on their ability to follow and implement plans and procedures, as well as their overall response to the simulated events. Personnel from DOE headquarters and national labs were on-site to observe and evaluate response operations.



WIPP Emergency Responders prepare for response to simulated incidents



Native Air Methods prepares to transport a simulated patient to the hospital.

During the one-day exercise, WIPP Emergency Responders, the Emergency Operations Center and Joint Information Center at WIPP were activated. DOE headquarters and a number of local offsite agencies also participated in the exercise. This participation allowed both WIPP and the offsite agencies to work together in a controlled environment, in an effort to better understand their capabilities and expectations. Participating organizations included: NM Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, Army National Guard, 64th Civil Support Team, Eddy and Lea Counties, Carlsbad Fire Department, Carlsbad Medical Center and Native Air Methods air ambulance.

The exercise, which included a simulated underground fire, mine rescue and radiological release, ran from approximately 9:00 am until 4:00 pm. While the duration of an actual event could be considerably longer, the compressed schedule still allowed the WIPP facility and the support organizations in the local community to demonstrate their capability to respond to an actual emergency. A post-exercise critique was held at each venue to identify activities that went well in the exercise, and areas where there are opportunities for improvement.