Waste Isolation Pilot Plant
Community Relations Plan – 2027



1.0 Introduction

1.1 Plan Required by Permit

This Community Relations Plan (Plan) is a requirement of the Hazardous Waste Facility Permit (Permit) for the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) facility. The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) re-issued the 10-year Permit to the U.S. Department of Energy and Salado Isolation Mining Contractors, LLC (SIMCO), the Permittees, in October 2023.

The Plan is tied to permit-related topics only. Topics outside the Permit are not included. Discussions regarding topics not related to the Permit should be brought to the attention of the community relations staff who will assist in identifying the proper venue for such discussions (contact information located in Section 3.5).

1.2 Participants

The intended participants of this Plan are individuals, organizations, special interest groups, communities, federal, state and local government entities, Tribal governments and Tribal members. Collectively, these members of the general public are referred to as "interested parties" in this Plan.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of the Plan is to provide permit-related information to interested parties and to alert them to opportunities for participation in the permit process. Permit-related activities include waste certification, transportation, waste receipt, storage and disposal operations at the WIPP facility, facility closure, post-closure and permit-driven corrective actions.

The DOE operates the WIPP facility in a transparent manner. The DOE has conducted WIPP Project outreach programs in New Mexico for more than three decades to establish open working relationships with interested parties. The Permittees view this Plan as an opportunity to expand participation and dialogue in the WIPP facility permit process.

The Plan is web-based to reach a broad spectrum of interested parties. Alternate methods to disseminate permit-related information to interested parties who may not have computer access are included in this Plan. These avenues of communication are further discussed in Section 3.0 *How to Use this Plan*.

2.0 Overview of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

So that interested parties may better understand the WIPP mission and Permit, this Plan begins with an overview of the WIPP facility.

The WIPP facility is owned and operated by the DOE through its Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO). Salado Isolation Mining Contractors, LLC (SIMCO) is the management and operating contractor hired by DOE to perform day-to-day plant operations. Under the Permit, SIMCO is considered a co-operator of the WIPP facility.

2.1 Location and Facility

The WIPP facility is located 26 miles southeast of Carlsbad, New Mexico. It is designed and operated for the safe disposal of transuranic (TRU) radioactive waste resulting from U.S. nuclear defense programs.

In 1992, Congress permanently withdrew 16 sections of land from all forms of entry, appropriation, and disposal under the public land laws to be used by the DOE for the purposes of fulfilling the WIPP mission of safely disposing of defense TRU waste.

The WIPP facility consists of surface structures used by WIPP facility personnel to receive and prepare waste for disposal and an underground repository that includes disposal rooms excavated from a geologically stable salt formation nearly one-half mile underground. A characteristic of the salt formation is an absence of circulating groundwater as a viable pathway to the accessible environment, which along with the prohibition on oil and gas drilling or other development from within the WIPP site, ensures long-term isolation of TRU mixed waste constituents.

Transuranic waste is a byproduct of the nation's nuclear defense program and consists of materials contaminated with radioactive elements, mostly plutonium. The majority of this waste resulted from federal government-sponsored research and development and the production of nuclear weapons. Transuranic waste is also being generated as the result of the decontamination and decommissioning of facilities involved in federal nuclear weapons activities.

Transuranic mixed waste contains both radioactive and hazardous waste components. Some TRU waste contains non-radioactive hazardous constituents such as metals and solvents, which are classified as hazardous waste under federal and state laws and regulations. The WIPP Permit is required in order for the DOE and SIMCO to manage and dispose of these hazardous wastes as TRU mixed waste. The NMED regulates the management, storage, and disposal of the hazardous waste contained in the TRU mixed waste through the Permit. The Permit requires that waste disposed in the permitted WIPP facility be managed as TRU mixed waste.

In 1999, NMED issued the initial Permit that allowed the DOE to receive its first TRU mixed waste shipment from the Rocky Flats Plant in Colorado for disposal at the WIPP facility. The Permit was renewed for a 10-year period in 2010. A second renewal application was submitted in March 2020 and a renewed Permit was issued in October 2023.

2.2 Regulatory Background and the Hazardous Waste Facility Permit

In 1976, the U.S. Congress passed the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) to regulate "cradle to grave" management of hazardous waste. In accordance with RCRA, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) can authorize states to implement their own hazardous waste regulatory programs in lieu of the federal program. The State of New Mexico is authorized to implement and enforce its own hazardous waste management program which includes regulating the hazardous components in TRU mixed waste that are disposed at the WIPP facility.

This Plan is specific to the New Mexico Hazardous Waste Management Regulations.

3.0 How to Use this Plan

3.1 Elements of the WIPP Community Relations Plan

The Permit requires the Permittees to describe in the Plan how they will accomplish the following:

1. Identify and establish an open, working relationship with interested parties.
2. Establish a productive government-to-government relationship between the DOE and affected nations, Tribes, and pueblos.

3. Keep interested parties informed of Permit actions of interest, to include pre-submittal meetings for Class 2 and 3 permit modification requests (PMRs).
4. Minimize disputes and resolve differences with interested parties.
5. Provide a mechanism for the timely dissemination of information in response to individual requests for information.
6. Establish mechanisms for interested parties to provide feedback and input to the permittees.
7. Conduct WIPP Community Forum public meetings three times per year with stakeholders, communities, and interested parties

3.2 A Broad Approach to Communicating Permit Activities

The Permittees determined that the most effective way to meet permit objectives regarding the Plan is a broad approach to communications with interested parties. The Plan makes permit-related information available to interested New Mexicans through numerous points of access.

The Permittees do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, or sex in its programs or activities, as required by applicable laws and regulations. The Permittees will include information about how individuals may request non-English speaker language assistance and accommodations for persons with disabilities (e.g., deaf and/or non-English language interpreters) in public notices, notices for public meetings, and hearing public notices related to particular permit modification requests or renewal. Notices will direct public requests for assistance to individual/s identified by the Permittees. Arrangements may be made by the Permittees for document translation, interpretation, or disability services related to the activity, as necessary. Hearing-impaired callers and persons with a disability can contact the Permittees with questions about the activity.

Affected Tribal governments and Tribal members will be provided information about WIPP permit-related actions in the same manner as that outlined in this Plan for interested parties. This manner is not to be understood as a surrogate for or amendment to DOE O 144.1, Department of Energy American Indian Tribal Government Interactions and Policy.

3.3 WIPP Project Web Page

This webpage (https://www.wipp.energy.gov) provides a broad spectrum of information regarding the WIPP Project in general, including links to information relevant to current Permit activities and public meeting schedules[1]. It also includes a link to the WIPP Permit Information Repository *wipp.energy.gov/information-repository-index* where interested parties can access specific documents related to the Permittees' compliance with Permit requirements. To assure public access, the webpage includes instructions for the software required to view documents in the WIPP Permit Information Repository and provides access to free downloads of the software required to view documents, as needed.

Documents available in the WIPP Information Repository include:

- The Permittees' Part A and Part B Permit Application associated with the Permit renewal
- A complete copy of the Permit, as it has been modified (by NMED's Hazardous Waste Bureau)
- Permit modifications at the request of the Permittees (i.e., Class 1, Class 1*, Class 2, Class 3, requests for determination of class) and temporary authorization requests associated with the Permit submitted pursuant to 20.4.1. 900 NMAC (incorporating 40 CFR §270.42) and any associated withdrawals by the Permittees and responses from the Secretary
- Waste Minimization Report submitted per Permit Part 2, Section 2.4
- Requests for extensions of time submitted per Permit Part 1, Section 1.10.3
- Corrective action documents submitted per Permit Part 8
- Each report submitted per the Permit Part 1, Sections 1.7.11 and 1.7.13, if such report is required to be submitted in writing
- Notices of Deficiency (NOD) or disapproval, NOD responses, final approval letters and directives from the Secretary of the NMED associated with renewal permit applications, permit modifications and corrective action documents
- Notices of Violation or administrative compliance orders, and responses to such required by the Secretary of the NMED and directives from the Secretary of the NMED associated with the Permit
- Biennial Reports submitted per Permit Section Part 2, Section 2.14.2

[1] Information on the RCRA Permit activities can be accessed from the WIPP home page by selecting the "Document" and "RCRA Permit" icons.

The WIPP Permit Information Repository provides access to permit-related documents dating back to 2009.

3.4 Notifications in Major Newspapers

Notifications regarding substantive (Class 2 and 3) PMRs by the Permittees or the NMED are published in major local newspapers as described in Section 3.7 below. Included in the notification is a description of the proposed Permit change, dates for a public comment period, contact information at NMED and the WIPP Project, and the time, dates and locations for public meetings. Notifications are provided in both English and Spanish in order to reach a broader population. This does not include notifications for pre-submittal meetings for Class 2 and Class 3 PMRs. These will be provided to interested parties separately.

3.5 Facility Mailing List

The facility mailing list consists of interested parties who have requested to be notified by mail of WIPP permit-related actions. By regulation, the NMED maintains the WIPP facility mailing list; the permittees are responsible for certain mail-outs to WIPP facility mailing list subscribers. The facility mailing list benefits users of the Community Relations webpage and interested parties who do not have computer access. Opportunities to subscribe to the facility mailing list are listed below. Please include your name, mailing address, phone number and organization, if any, when you subscribe to the facility mailing list.



Options for signing up include:

- Email the request to *communityrelations@wipp.doe.gov* and request to be added to the facility mailing list
- Email the request directly to the New Mexico Environment Department at ~~ricardo.maestas@env.nm.gov~~ megan.mclean@env.nm.gov
- Sign up at a WIPP Hazardous Waste Facility Permit public meeting
- Call 1-866-271-9640 and request to be added
- Mail a request to subscribe to: ~~Ricardo Maestas~~ Megan McLean, New Mexico Environment Department, 2905 Rodeo Park Drive East, Building 1, Santa Fe, N.M. 87505 OR Bobby St. John, SIMCO, P.O. Box 2078, Carlsbad, N.M. 88221

3.6 Email Notification Service

The Permittees also maintain a permit-related email notification service. Subscribers to this service are assured of timely email notification for a specific set of Permit actions. This service provides information regarding permit-related actions that would not otherwise be directly available to interested parties. Adding your name to the email notification service is quick and easy. The names of subscribers will be kept confidential.

Visit *wipp.energy.gov/Stakeholders-Notice* and follow the directions to sign up.

3.7 Public Meeting

Federal and state regulations require hazardous waste facilities to schedule public meetings for Class 2 and 3 PMRs and for renewal applications. These public meetings provide the Permittees a forum to explain proposed changes to hazardous waste management and for interested parties to ask questions regarding the proposed changes and express their views by submitting written comments specifically regarding the PMRs to the NMED. Interested parties are notified of public meeting schedules in the following newspapers (in both English and Spanish):

- Carlsbad Current-Argus
- Albuquerque Journal
- Santa Fe New Mexican

- ~~Indian Country Today~~
- Roswell Daily Record (on the date of a bi-monthly Spanish page edition)
- Local newspaper where the community forum is being held (if available)

In addition to the meetings required by RCRA regulations, the Permittees conduct pre-submittal meetings prior to finalizing a Class 2 or 3 PMR. These meetings are intended to gather comments from interested parties that help the Permittees finalize a Class 2 or 3 PMR. Interested parties are encouraged to monitor the Community Relations web page and subscribe to the WIPP facility mailing list for public meeting schedules related to Class 2 or 3 PMRs.

Permit Modification Requests and Permit renewal applications can be reviewed on the WIPP Permit Information Repository *wipp.energy.gov/information-repository-index.* The link provides the opportunity to review and submit comments on Permit Modification Requests and Permit renewal applications to the NMED.

The Permittees will conduct WIPP Community Forum public meetings three times per year with interested parties. Notification of these public meetings will be via broad communication methods outlined in the Plan, as described above for Class 2 and 3 PMRs. Notification will occur at least 30 days before the meeting. The WIPP Community Forum public meetings will provide interested parties an opportunity to ask questions regarding the Permit and other WIPP-related topics of interest. Meetings will be live at a location determined by the Permittees, as well as virtual to reach a larger number of interested parties. Meetings will be conducted as described in Section 3.2.

3.8 Community Relations Plan Email Address

A Community Relations Plan email address provides direct communication to WIPP project staff for inquiries related to the Permit. The email account is monitored by staff members during normal business hours, Monday through Thursday, 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The Permittees will respond to requests as quickly as possible, within the constraints of applicable regulations such as those involving dissemination of security or personal information. That email address is *communityrelations@wipp.doe.gov.*

3.9 Toll-free Telephone Number

A Community Relations Plan toll free telephone number is a convenient way to contact Permittee staff for Permit-related information or questions. The toll-free number will be staffed during normal business hours, Monday through Thursday from 7:30 a.m.to 4:30 p.m. If prompted, be sure to leave a message so someone can get back to you.

The toll-free number is 1-866-271-9640.

3.10 Public Outreach Products

To increase awareness of the Plan, the Community Relations Plan webpage address, toll-free telephone number and dedicated email address will be printed on WIPP Project information products and permit-related public notifications in major newspapers.

4.0 Community Relations Plan Goals

4.1 Changes to the Plan

The goal of this Plan is to provide timely information to interested parties about Permit actions and opportunities for participation in the Permit process so that they can be informed about Permit actions.

The Plan is intended to be useful and responsive to public information needs related to the Permit. It is a "living" document which is expected to change to accommodate public and Permittee input as well as new communication technologies.

In October of each year, the Permittees will solicit comments and suggestions from interested parties through major local newspapers, the facility mailing list, and the web-based Community Relations Plan. Periodic changes may be made to the Plan to enhance functionality and content, or to incorporate new or changed Permit conditions. Interested parties are encouraged to send comments or suggestions to improve the Plan at any time. Comments may be sent by email using the form in the Comments section of the Plan or to *communityrelations@wipp.doe.gov.* Comments also may be sent by mail to Bobby St. John, SIMCO, P.O. Box 2078, Carlsbad, N.M., 88221.

4.2 Resolving Differences Between the Interested Parties and Permittees Regarding the Community Relations Plan

The Permittees will give careful consideration to comments and suggestions, and work in consultation with interested parties to avoid disputes and to resolve differences regarding the Community Relations Plan.

The Permittees will address comments that require a response and provide the response to the interested parties who originated it. Responses specific to this Plan will be posted to the Community Relations Plan Web page, with the consent of the interested parties involved.

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5.0 Resources

The Permittees will provide the resources necessary to maintain the Plan for as long as the Plan is a requirement of the Permit.

6.0 Records Management

Consistent with Permit requirements, the Permittees will annually compile comments from interested parties concerning how they may become informed of the topics related to the Permit. The Permittees shall annually post on the WIPP home page the compilation of such comments[2], including any statements of disagreement, with the express consent of the commenting interested party(ies).

[2] Comments on the most recent Community Relations Plan can be accessed at: https://wipp.energy.gov/community-outreach.asp#1. Archived comments can be accessed at: https://wipp.energy.gov/community-outreach.asp#2.