

February 25, 2015

### Frequently Asked Questions

**Is any water flowing in though the exhaust shaft, as reported by Lokesh Chaturvedi many years ago?**

There is some shallow seepage into the exhaust shaft, as is the case with all mine shafts in the area. The WIPP exhaust shaft is considered a dry shaft by mining standards.

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**Were there any sensors in place that detected the 8x8x2' chunk of ceiling? Since the area was contaminated, how much plutonium was dispersed and lofted into the air as a result of the roof fall?**

The roof fall was discovered during routine ground control and bulkhead inspections conducted by geotechnical staff. It was known that this area required bolting since before the events of last February, which put a halt to ground control activity. Due to significant bolt loss, access to this area had been restricted, and no WIPP personnel were present at the time of the roof fall. A limited amount of radiological surveying has been done in that area of the mine to date. No impact has been apparent in survey data from other portions of the mine.

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**Paint and water might temporarily encapsulate the contamination, BUT NOT decontaminate. Why do you all use the word “decontaminate”?**

“Decontamination” was a term that was applied early on to the concept of reducing airborne contamination. With alpha and beta particles, such as at WIPP, that is the main concern because they are most harmful when inhaled. Decontamination in a salt environment is unique, and decontamination methods that have been used on engineered surfaces would not be useable in the mine. With use of a water mist, the contamination will be well encapsulated in the salt matrix and will not become airborne.

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**Reference to data collected on January 17 indicating that Beta numbers at Station B are higher than Station A during a 24-hour time period. WHY are the levels HIGHER After Filtration than Before . . .? - for the same 24 hr. time period**

It is possible to see higher count rates at Station B because of background levels of radiation in the area from environmental and other non-WIPP sources. These levels change depending on wind patterns, weather, etc. Additionally, because the count rates are so low, they largely fall within the margin of error of the equipment.

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**DOE-WIPP, if congress orders that WIPP be terminated how long would it take to accomplish the closure?**

An immediate closure scenario is not an option currently being contemplated by the Department of Energy. Thus, that figure is not available.

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**How is the worker doing who was injured during the Feb 5th fire?**

That is a question that would need to be answered by the individual. Under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, we are not permitted to release medical information.

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**What are the radiation readings in the air release shafts?**

Further surveying is needed to more accurately quantify contamination levels in that area of the mine. As far as contamination reaching the environment, the ventilation system is currently operating in HEPA filtration mode, which means that air flowing through the exhaust shaft is filtered to remove any contaminants.

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**Where is the intake for the ventilation in relation to the diesel fumes?**

In the locations where diesel equipment is being operated, diesel particulate matter (DPM) is measured for worker safety. WIPP levels have averaged only 11% of the MSHA limit.

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**Will photos from the project reach work be made public in addition to the video? If so, when?**

The Accident Investigation Board may make additional imaging available after its report is completed.

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**During the mist spray how will any runoff be controlled and treated? Will mine exhaust humidity be affected by the misting spray?**

As only a water mist is being used, there will be a minimal amount of runoff, and any runoff should be contained by the porous nature of the salt floor. The water mist will have a very limited effect on the humidity of the mine. Weather conditions have the greatest impact on mine humidity.

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**What procedure do they use to decontaminate the workers, i.e., is there a vacuum chamber?**

Radiological buffer areas (RBA) have been established between contaminated areas and controlled areas (clean). Barricades are in place to denote the boundaries. Workers remove personal protective equipment (PPE) at the RBA and are surveyed for any contamination. Because the PPE and respirators fully encapsulate the workers and there have been no breaches, no decontamination of the workers has been necessary. With alpha and beta particles, such as at WIPP, the main concern is internal dose because the particles are most harmful when inhaled. During WIPP's recovery, all worker bioassay tests, which measure contamination within the body, have been negative.

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**When they take off the respirators that are contaminated, do they hold their breath?**

That is not necessary. The respirator pulls air through a filter where any contaminants are trapped. The filter is inside of the respirator.

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**They've said before it's NOT decontamination - why are they referring to it as decontamination now? It seems very misleading - just like calling transuranic waste "low level."**

See question No. 3.

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**You said that you take underground alpha radiation measurements. Why, after a year of requesting that data, has it not been released to the public?**

An underground map is currently in development. There is a large amount of data that is being compiled, as radiation technicians are routinely conducting surveys utilizing a variety of equipment and methods.