



U.S. Department of Energy  
Carlsbad Field Office  
Waste Isolation Pilot Plant  
P.O. Box 3090  
Carlsbad, New Mexico 88221

**Media Contact:**

Tim Runyon  
CBFO Communications  
(575) 234-7545

[www.wipp.energy.gov](http://www.wipp.energy.gov)

 @WIPPNews

**WIPP UPDATE: October 14, 2016**

**Plans Call for Controlled Withdrawal from South End of Underground**

At a Carlsbad Town Hall Meeting last night, the Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO) announced its intention to close the far south end of the WIPP underground. CBFO initiated discussions with the New Mexico Environment Department and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency earlier this week, and efforts are underway to develop a plan to close the far south end of the mine. The decision to close the far south end is being made after balancing worker safety issues, overall issues related to rock bolting and ground control in contaminated areas, efficient use of resources, and the long-term integrity of the underground. Withdrawal from this area will address worker safety issues and allow crews to focus ground control operations and resources on active areas of the mine.

The far south end includes all drifts and cross drifts between waste disposal panels south of drift S2750. This area is within the zone that was contaminated as a result of the February 2014 radiological release and is also the location of a series of recent rock falls (see map below and previous [WIPP Updates](#)).

In January 2015, a roof fall occurred in the access drift to Panel 3. Two additional rock falls have occurred a week apart in September and October 2016. There is no immediate worker health and safety risk associated with these events, as workers had already been prohibited from entering these areas. After almost three years of reduced ground control, areas in the far south end of the WIPP underground are showing increased signs of deterioration due to salt creep that naturally occurs over time. This salt creep is what will eventually seal the TRU waste and is an important characteristic in choosing the location of WIPP.

“We met with our workforce, the geotechnical experts, and the miners that are doing maintenance and inspections in those areas every day and weighed our options,” said CBFO Manager Todd Shrader. “We believe this is the best path forward for ensuring the safety of the workforce and positioning WIPP for future operations.”

Closure of this area will not affect reopening preparations and waste emplacement activities, nor will it limit the ability of the facility to operate when it reopens. DOE is committed to reopening WIPP in a safe and timely fashion.

Additional updates will be provided as these efforts progress.

