

DOENews

Operations Personnel Responding to Radiological Event at WIPP

CARLSBAD, N.M., February 15, 2014, 9:17 PM (MST) – Operations personnel are responding to a radiological event at the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP).

NEW INFORMATION

- At 11:30 PM Friday, a continuous air monitor detected airborne radiation in the underground.
- Multiple perimeter monitors at the WIPP boundary have confirmed there is no danger to human health or the environment. No contamination has been found on any equipment, personnel, or facilities.
- Any possible release is minimized by the highly protective filtration system that is designed to filter any air leaving the WIPP repository.
- WIPP's ventilation system automatically switched to Filtration Mode when airborne radiation was detected underground.
- As a precautionary measure, employees on the surface were instructed to shelter in place.
- At 5:00 PM MST, a determination was made to allow non-essential employees to leave the site.
- These employees were cleared by radiological control technicians prior to departure. All non-essential employees were off-site by 5:30 PM MST.

Previously Released at 2:49 p.m.

- At 11:30 PM Friday, a continuous air monitor detected airborne radiation in the underground

- WIPP officials are on site to assess the situation and determine next steps
- There were no employees working underground at the time and employees on the surface have been sheltered in place as a precaution
- No personnel contamination has been identified

A Joint Information Center (JIC) has been activated in Carlsbad, located at 4021 National Parks Highway, to provide public information. Public inquiries can be made to the JIC from Carlsbad by calling (575) 234-7380 and (575) 234-7305 for media inquiries. If outside the local calling area, call 1-800-336-9477 for updated information.

Concerned residents can listen to their local radio stations to receive fast-breaking information announced by the JIC.

WIPP, a cornerstone of DOE's cleanup effort, is the nation's first repository for the permanent disposal of defense-generated transuranic radioactive waste left from research and production of nuclear weapons.

Located in southeastern New Mexico, 26 miles east of Carlsbad, WIPP's facilities include disposal rooms excavated in an ancient, stable salt formation, 2,150 feet (almost one-half mile) underground. Waste disposal began at WIPP on March 26, 1999.

For more information about WIPP, call 1-800-336-9477, or visit the WIPP Web site at <http://www.wipp.energy.gov>.