



Department of Energy
Carlsbad Field Office
P. O. Box 3090
Carlsbad, New Mexico 88221

April 25, 2014

Eddy and Lea County Residents:

We continue to make progress in our recovery efforts at the U.S. Department of Energy's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), and we are learning more about the conditions at WIPP's underground facility.

A team of workers entered the mine on Wednesday, April 23, 2014. Their mission was to proceed to the waste disposal area in Panel 7 for a visual inspection to determine what might have caused the radiological release on February 14, 2014.

As always, safety is our main concern, so the team made thorough and careful preparations before they entered the underground facility. As a precaution, they wore specialized protective clothing and BG-4 closed-circuit breathing devices similar to those used by firefighters.

The team successfully made their way to Room 7 in Panel 7. The waste in that area looked undisturbed and there was not a visible cause for the radiological release. Their instruments detected contamination on the ground, which confirms that Room 7 was the site of the release as earlier data led us to believe. The team took photos and gathered technical information that is being analyzed by some of the industry's leading experts as we move toward identifying and mitigating the source of the release.

We were also able to welcome 90 workers back to the site this week. They will be engaged in work above ground and play an active and important role in our ongoing recovery efforts.

Yesterday, the Department of Energy's Accident Investigation Board released its report on the February 14, 2014 radiological event. This group of experts had unlimited access to WIPP employees, procedures, documentation and the facility's emergency response following the event. The board conducted a full investigation and made recommendations in the report. After the source of the radiological release has been determined, the board will release a supplemental report focused on the direct cause of the release and worker protection measures in the underground facility.

I want to assure you that we take the Board's findings and recommendations very seriously. The Carlsbad Field Office and Nuclear Waste Partnership LLC, the operating and management contractor at WIPP, already have begun making improvements that will benefit the workforce and the facility.

We brought in experienced nuclear professionals to assist with recovery and management efforts and installed a real-time continuous air monitor at Station B. We also are refining our response procedures, specifying immediate actions to take during an emergency and conducting frequent emergency response training and drills.

We appreciate your patience and support as we work toward resuming full waste operations at WIPP.

Sincerely,

//Signature on File//

Jose R. Franco, Manager
U.S. Department of Energy
Carlsbad Field Office