



Department of Energy
Carlsbad Field Office
P. O. Box 3090
Carlsbad, New Mexico 88221
May 2, 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 are gaining more clarity about the events on February 14.

Last week, teams performed an initial visual inspection in the waste space of Room 7 in Panel 7 to determine what might have caused the radiological release. The entry confirmed that the source of the radiation release was in Room 7, but the cause of the release was not immediately evident.

On Wednesday, teams returned to the underground facility to obtain better visuals that will help us determine the exact location and possible cause of the radiation release. Employees brought ladders and camera extensions to get closer to the area we are investigating.

We discovered that some of the large magnesium oxide bags that are placed on top of waste disposal containers during disposal were damaged. The magnesium oxide in the 3,000-4,200 pound bags acts as a barrier, helping to prevent the radioactive material from being releasing into the environment for 10,000 years. During the next entry, our employees will bring equipment that allows cameras to access the area of concern. Meanwhile, our engineers and scientists are reviewing all of the available information to figure out what happened.

We are taking all actions necessary to ensure our workers, the public, and the environment are safe, and you have access to the best data available. Since the radiological event in February, we have expanded our air monitoring network. Eight new locations are operational, and we will have two additional locations installed by the end of the month. WIPP also now has active monitors in Hobbs, Eunice, Artesia and Loving, and all of these stations are returning clean samples.

We are refining our recovery plan as we learn additional details from Room 7. We also, continue to work on enhancing our decontamination efforts since it is required before waste disposal operations resume. WIPP is working with experts from across the country to learn about new technologies and the best approaches for salt decontamination. We have some promising leads from the Idaho National Laboratory and the Science and Technology division at DOE's Office of Environmental Management in Washington, D.C.

Finally, I want to say a special thank you to our workforce and the surrounding communities for your support as we work toward resuming our important mission at WIPP.

Sincerely,

//Signature on File//

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