



Department of Energy
Carlsbad Field Office
P. O. Box 3090
Carlsbad, New Mexico 88221
May 9, 2014

Eddy and Lea County Residents:

Since the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant was shut down following two separate incidents in February, we have been working hard to understand the cause of the incidents so that we can fix the problems and safely reopen the repository. It has been a methodical, intense process to protect our workers, the public and the environment, while getting to the bottom of the fire and the radiation release.

We understand that everyone – our workers, the Department of Energy, our regulators and the public – wants answers. We have been working diligently to that end. DOE commissioned two accident investigation teams with experts from a wide range of fields to determine what caused the incidents and to make recommendations to prevent them from recurring. We also brought in technical experts and consultants from across the Department of Energy complex and its national laboratories to help us better understand what happened and to safely recover. We still do not, however, have all the answers.

As we work towards answers, it is critical that we protect our workers and that, more than any single factor, has caused us to take a careful, methodical approach to the process. Before we send teams into the underground facility to explore the scene of the radiation release, we develop, review and approve specific work packages that outline all of the anticipated hazards the workers will face, and how we can mitigate those hazards. After each entry, we cycle the information they bring back about conditions and potential hazards into the work packages for later entries.

The amount of time workers can spend in the underground facility is limited by protective equipment, including breathing supply and how long the workers can tolerate the heat generated inside the protective clothing. It also takes time getting from the mine entry point to the room where we believe the radiological release originated. Decontamination activities after the teams leave a contaminated area, but before they return to the surface, also take time.

Because there are still unanswered questions about the cause of the radiation release, our contractor is being extremely cautious about sending employees into the underground facility, and they are committed to making sure those employees are safe when they do. All of this slows down the investigation process, but no one is willing to compromise safety as we continue to search for answers.

We appreciate everyone's desire to know the exact cause of the radiation release, and we will continue the investigation until we know what happened. In the meantime, we appreciate everyone's patience with what must be a methodical but safe investigative process.

Sincerely,

//Signature on File//

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