



## Department of Energy

Carlsbad Field Office

P. O. Box 3090

Carlsbad, New Mexico 88221

May 19, 2014

Eddy and Lea County Residents:

As we continue the investigation into what caused the February 14 radiation release at WIPP, we made a significant discovery during last week's entry: a Los Alamos National Laboratory waste container with its lid unsealed showing significant heat discoloration. The discovery of this drum provides further evidence of a significant heat event in Room 7 of Panel 7, where we believe the radiation release originated.

We do not yet know exactly what caused the damage to the drum or if this is the only waste drum that was involved. We will pursue more visual evidence through photographs and video, taking samples off of potentially contaminated surfaces, and performing chemical and radiological analysis of materials as we continue to pinpoint the release. Meanwhile, we are working with officials at Los Alamos and Waste Control Specialists in Texas, where similar drums are temporarily stored, to ensure they are stored and handled safely.

Recovery efforts also continue to progress at WIPP. I'd like to take the opportunity to acknowledge our workforce, which has stepped up to the challenge of taking on different types of work, sometimes requiring additional training, to support the recovery process. For example, several of our waste handlers are helping to clean the residual soot that was deposited on the Waste Hoist Tower during the Feb. 5 fire. Getting the Waste Hoist back in operation is critical to safely sending more workers into the underground facility to carry out maintenance activities. We currently have employees from waste operations and maintenance conducting preventative maintenance on waste handling equipment and operations personnel and workers from the underground fab shop performing other maintenance activities in the facility. The support of all our employees is critical to the recovery effort.

We have been able to declare a Radiological Buffer Area between the two entry areas we are using, which allows us to make longer and more productive entries into the underground facility. We are also continuing preparations for changing the ventilation filter system, including equipment procurement, construction of a temporary containment facility, worker training, and review and approval of procedures. Finally, planning continues on the long-term upgrade of the ventilation system.

We'll continue to keep you informed as we learn more about the cause of the release, and the recovery process moves forward.

Sincerely,

**//Signature on File//**

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