

EM SSAB Chairs Meeting
Idaho Falls, Idaho
Draft Chairs Recommendation
September 17-18, 2014

Initiate Process of Permit Modification for Additional Surface Storage at WIPP

Background

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) has been operating since 1999 as the only underground repository for transuranic (TRU) waste disposal. Having the WIPP facility available for TRU waste disposal has been shown to be extremely important to the Department of Energy (DOE) as well as sites across the United States needing to safely and reliably dispose of TRU waste. WIPP operations on a continuing basis are critical to the success of the DOE Office of Environmental Management's (EM) waste disposal mission.

Observations and Comments

With the recent shutdown of WIPP, DOE efforts to complete programs for the shipment of TRU waste from sites needing this method of waste disposal have been jeopardized. The shutdown of WIPP has rendered these sites unable to complete commitments due to respective state consent orders or regulatory requirements. Planning for future shipments to WIPP is also now on hold with no effective time table of when shipments may be able to resume.

Building of additional TRU waste storage facilities at the various generator sites with limited lifetime expectancies is neither efficient nor cost effective. It would be wise to not duplicate the permitting process at multiple sites and concentrate on one site that can truly facilitate permanent long-term disposal of TRU waste.

Reestablishing the current means and methods of TRU waste transport from sites would maintain the present available transport system readiness, keep personnel training levels and maintain effective use of present facilities. An additional consideration to transporting waste as soon as feasible is that transportation costs will likely rise significantly in the ensuing years.

Recommendation

Due to the serious problems that the shutdown of the WIPP has caused the various DOE facilities that must ship TRU waste, the Environmental Management Site-Specific Advisory Board recommends that DOE-EM Headquarters should immediately prepare to expand the above-ground TRU waste interim storage installation at WIPP so that EM sites can proceed with TRU waste shipments even before the underground WIPP disposal operation is approved for reopening.