



WIPP Chronology

1957 The National Academy of Sciences concludes that the most promising method of disposal of radioactive waste is in salt deposits.

1974 The U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) chooses an ancient salt bed 26 miles east of Carlsbad for exploratory work in the search for an underground radioactive waste repository site.



First receipt of waste at WIPP on March 26, 1999.

1979 Congress authorizes WIPP as a research and development facility to demonstrate the safe disposal of radioactive waste from defense activities not regulated by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC).

1981 The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), formerly the AEC, issues a record of decision based on an environmental impact statement to proceed with WIPP construction, and the first exploratory shaft is drilled. New Mexico Attorney General Jeff Bingaman files a lawsuit in federal court against the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), which has jurisdiction of the land where WIPP is located, and DOE, alleging violations of federal and state law. The lawsuit is settled by an agreement for more study and communication with the state, as well as addressing concerns such as emergency response and highway improvements.

1985 The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) establishes radioactive waste disposal regulations specifically addressing transuranic (TRU) waste and WIPP, after DOE and the state of New Mexico agree WIPP must comply with EPA regulations.

1989 NRC certifies DOE's main contact-handled (CH) TRU waste shipping cask, the Transuranic Packaging Transporter Model 2 (TRUPACT-II). DOE completes repository construction.

1990 DOE issues a record of decision based on a supplemental environmental impact statement to continue with phased development of WIPP. EPA authorizes the state of New Mexico to issue and enforce a hazardous waste facility permit under the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) for disposal of waste that includes hazardous materials such as solvents or metals (mixed waste).

1991 New Mexico Attorney General Tom Udall files a federal lawsuit against DOE and DOI regarding the withdrawal of land from public use for a WIPP testing phase. The lawsuit is later combined with another brought by several environmental groups alleging WIPP lacks interim status under RCRA that would allow WIPP to be treated as if a hazardous waste facility permit had been issued.

1992 U.S. District Judge John Garrett Penn imposes an injunction, ruling the Interior Secretary exceeded his authority by changing the purpose of the land withdrawal from construction to testing, which includes transporting waste to WIPP. President Bush signs into law the WIPP Land Withdrawal Act, which transfers

Did you know ...

Underground excavation at WIPP began in 1982.



The first shipment of RH-TRU waste arrived safely at WIPP on January 23, 2007.

For more information

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jurisdiction of the land to DOE and includes a number of other provisions, for example, prohibiting disposal of high-level waste and spent nuclear fuel, setting a disposal limit, and giving EPA responsibility for determining compliance with federal radioactive waste disposal regulations.

1993 DOE announces radioactive waste tests planned for WIPP will be moved to national laboratories. DOE creates the Carlsbad Area Office (CAO), directly linking WIPP with DOE headquarters.

1996 President Clinton signs legislation amending the WIPP Land Withdrawal Act, including the elimination of test phase language.

1998 DOE issues a record of decision based on a second supplemental environmental impact statement to dispose of waste at WIPP. After eight public hearings around the country, EPA certifies that WIPP meets all applicable federal radioactive waste disposal regulations.

1999 Judge Penn rules that the 1992 injunction no longer applies and that WIPP qualifies for interim status under RCRA. The first shipment is scheduled to leave Los Alamos National Laboratory early March 25, but due to heavy fog, it leaves late in the day, arriving at WIPP at 4 a.m. March 26. Hundreds of employees and local officials are present. Numerous dignitaries attend a grand opening celebration held at a later date. Shipments are received from Idaho National Environmental and Engineering Laboratory (INEEL) and Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site. The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) issues a hazardous waste facility permit.

2000 NRC certifies the RH-72B for shipping remote-handled (RH) TRU waste and the HalfPACT for heavy drums of CH waste. The first shipment from the Hanford Site and the first shipment of mixed waste arrive at WIPP. CAO is elevated to a full field office.

2001 The first shipment from the Savannah River Site (SRS) arrives at WIPP.

2002 The first shipment of waste characterized (container contents verified) by the mobile Central Characterization Project arrives at WIPP from SRS. The final shipment of TRU waste to meet a 3,100-cubic-meter project milestone for INEEL arrives two months ahead of schedule.

2003 Panel 1 is filled. The first shipment from Argonne National Laboratory-East arrives at WIPP.

2004 EPA approves DOE characterization plans for RH-TRU waste disposal at WIPP. WIPP receives CH shipments from the Nevada Test Site, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, and Argonne National Laboratory-West, bringing the total number of sites that have shipped to WIPP to nine.

2005 The final TRU waste shipment from Rocky Flats is received at WIPP, allowing the large quantity waste site to close a year ahead of schedule. Panel 2 is filled. TRU waste cleanup is completed at five small quantity sites, bringing the total to 12.

2006 EPA recertifies WIPP. Mining of Panel 5 of eight planned underground waste panels begins. WIPP receives its 5,000th shipment. NMED approves a hazardous waste facility permit modification allowing WIPP to receive RH-TRU waste and bringing greater efficiency to the characterization process. WIPP receives the most shipments ever in one week (35).

2007 First shipment of RH-TRU waste arrives safely at WIPP on January 23.