

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

April 4, 2025

TO: Acting Technical Director
FROM: WIPP Cognizant Engineer
SUBJECT: Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) Report for March 2025

DNFSB Staff Activity. The WIPP and National Transuranic Waste Program cognizant engineers held weekly meetings to maintain awareness of mining and waste handling activities.

From March 17 through 20, DNFSB staff were onsite to observe the contractor readiness assessment (CRA) for startup of the Safety Significant Confinement Ventilation System (SSCVS) project, now referred to as the Underground Ventilation System or UVS. The staff team observed three performance demonstrations, a drill, and various interviews of Salado Isolation Mining Contractors, LLC (SIMCO) personnel. The three performance demonstrations included (1) operation of the UVS in direct filter mode, (2) replacement of pre-filters, and (3) operation of the UVS diesel generators. The staff team observed interviews related to fire protection, training, nuclear safety, radiological control, and contractor assurance. Additionally, on March 27, DNFSB staff virtually attended the CRA team's exit brief.

Underground Ventilation System (UVS)–Readiness. From March 17 through 27, a CRA team was onsite to conduct a review of the UVS. The review was performed by an external team of nine subject matter experts. The CRA team identified two pre-start findings, which related to updating the fire hazard analysis and adding external communication capabilities to the new filter building. Both findings were closed during the CRA; however, two pre-start items, identified by SIMCO in February, remain open independent of the CRA (see WIPP Monthly for February 2025). The CRA team concluded that SIMCO has adequately demonstrated the readiness of equipment, procedures, and personnel to startup UVS operations. A DNFSB staff team plans to observe the federal readiness assessment the week of April 21.

Critical Decision 4 Approval. On March 12, DOE's Office of Environmental Management approved the exemption request to allow for critical decision 4 approval of the SSCVS project after the management self-assessment, but before the contractor readiness and federal readiness assessments are completed (see WIPP Monthly for January 2025).

Safety Basis. In March, SIMCO transmitted revision 11, an annual update, of the documented safety analysis to CBFO for review and approval. Revision 11 captures changes, including the addition of new shielded containers, the incorporation of a recent safety evaluation, and other minor comments.

Planned Maintenance Outage. On March 14, site personnel completed the annual maintenance outage and on March 16 transuranic waste shipments to WIPP resumed. SIMCO commenced waste processing in the waste handling building and plans to resume waste emplacement in early April (see WIPP Monthly for December 2024).

External Oversight. This month, all open citations from the prior Mine Safety and Health Administration inspections were verified complete and deemed terminated.