

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

July 3, 2025

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

DNFSB Staff Activity. On June 18, the Board transmitted a letter, *WIPP Shafts and Escapeway Hoists [2025-100-021]*, to the Secretary of Energy that highlighted reliability issues related to the degradation of shafts and hoists relied on for underground worker evacuation. The Board's letter requested a brief written report on: (1) the timeline and plan to reduce the risk from degraded escapeway hoists to facility workers, including any interim compensatory measures necessary to ensure the safety of ongoing operations; and (2) an evaluation of the adequacy of existing site aging infrastructure management processes based on recent experiences with degraded shafts and escapeway hoists. The WIPP and National Transuranic Waste Program cognizant engineers held weekly meetings to maintain awareness of mining and waste handling activities.

Annual Recertification Audit–National TRU Program. On June 17, Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO) quality assurance personnel began the annual recertification audit of the Central Characterization Program (CCP) at Los Alamos National Laboratory. On June 25, an auditor inquiry prompted CCP personnel to compare the Flammable Gas Analysis (FGA) data in the Waste Data System (WDS) to the data captured in paper records. CCP and Salado Isolation Mining Contractors, LLC (SIMCO) Packaging personnel identified discrepancies between the paper records and the data in WDS (the electronic database used by DOE to track WIPP shipments). The FGA data in WDS is used to calculate the flammable gas generation rate (FGGR) to determine compliance with the TRUPACT-II shipping requirements to meet the certificate of compliance for Type B shipping packages. Auditors noted that 21 waste containers, originating from multiple waste generator sites, were implicated in FGA-related data transfer errors. Upon discovery, CCP and SIMCO Packaging personnel promptly began evaluating the data discrepancies. Of the 21 containers emplaced, one drum had a non-conservative error related to FGGR. SIMCO personnel entered a Limiting Condition for Operation (LCO) related to receiving a drum not meeting the WIPP Waste Acceptance Criteria. LCO actions included suspending waste-handling activities and limiting entry into the affected areas. SIMCO personnel are working on related response plans and regulatory notifications.

Utility Shaft. On June 6, subcontractor personnel resumed grouting work to repair a water leak near a construction joint in the concrete liner of the Utility Shaft. This work has been paused due to a concrete spalling incident (see WIPP Monthly for May 2025). Workers implemented preventive measures to limit additional spalling and completed the grouting work on June 19, successfully stopping the water leak.

Underground Ventilation System (UVS)–Startup. On June 24, CBFO transmitted a letter to SIMCO, *Authorization to Startup Safety Significant Confinement Ventilation System*, documenting the Field Office Manager's approval to commence operation of the Underground Ventilation System. The letter noted that all items necessary to allow operations to commence were completed as required by DOE Order 425.1D, *Verification of Readiness to Startup or Restart Nuclear Facilities*.