

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

December 6, 2024

TO: Timothy J. Dwyer, Technical Director
FROM: A. Boussouf, Cognizant Engineer
SUBJECT: Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) Report for November 2024

DNFSB Staff Activity. A. Boussouf commenced duties as WIPP cognizant engineer. The Board's WIPP cognizant engineer held weekly meetings to maintain awareness of mining and waste handling activities.

Safety Culture. In late October, a team from the U.S. Department of Energy Safety Culture Improvement Panel was onsite to perform a safety culture assistance visit. The visit included observing pre-job briefings, conducting employee interviews, holding focus group discussions, and performing document reviews. The visit was requested by the Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO) to provide feedback on safety culture and organizational climate. At the conclusion of the visit, the panel held an out-briefing, where they provided recommendations aimed at improving senior leadership visibility, implementing a graded approach to the stop work procedure, and enhancing transparency between CBFO, the Carlsbad Technical Assistance Contractor (CTAC), and Salado Isolation Mining Contractors (SIMCO).

Mining Incident. On November 25, during night shift, a mining operator was struck by a piece of metal debris which imbedded in their shoulder. The worker was transported to the Carlsbad Medical Center for medical treatment. Following the incident, SIMCO initiated a stop work order for all mining activities in non-virgin ground. An event learning review was held on December 5. Meeting personnel noted that the metal projectile was recovered and is being evaluated to determine its origin. Potential corrective actions include performing more frequent drill bit inspections, updating the job hazards analysis to account for this specific hazard, providing additional guidance on safe positioning of personnel, and briefing all miners on recognizing ventilation conditions which may affect visibility.

Federal Oversight. On November 13, Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) personnel were onsite to conduct their first quarterly inspection of fiscal year 2025. MSHA issued ten citations, six within the subsurface facilities, three within surface facilities, and one for the utility shaft project. No citations were designated as significant or substantial. Nine of the ten citations have been addressed and remedied. The remaining open item is scheduled to be completed by December 6.

Flooding Affects WIPP Shipments. On November 5, CBFO resumed shipments along the flood damaged portion of U.S. Highway 285 (see WIPP Monthly for October 2024).

Safety Significant Confinement Ventilation System (SSCVS). The planned October 23, turnover of the SSCVS to SIMCO Operations was delayed (see WIPP Monthly for October 2024). The SSCVS construction contractor, The Industrial Company, now plans to complete turnover to SIMCO on December 2.