

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

January 31, 2025

TO: R. T. Davis, Acting Technical Director
FROM: A. Boussouf, Cognizant Engineer
SUBJECT: Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) Report for January 2025

DNFSB Staff Activity. The Board's WIPP cognizant engineer held weekly meetings to maintain awareness of mining and waste handling activities. On January 16, DNFSB staff held a teleconference call with the Safety Significant Confinement Ventilation System (SSCVS) Project Federal Director, and Deputy Director to clarify the timing of Critical Decision 4 (CD-4) declaration. Project personnel plan to submit an exemption request to DOE's Office of Environmental Management, allowing for completion of CD-4 after the management self-assessment but before the contractor readiness assessment is conducted. Construction and testing of the SSCVS Project are complete, including the Salt Reduction System and its isolation dampers; however, the safety significant continuous air monitor system that activates the isolation dampers is not part of the SSCVS project, and for that reason is not included in the CD-4. The contractor and federal readiness assessments will be conducted following CD-4 approval with the Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO) as the startup approval authority.

On January 13, DNFSB staff held a scoping call with CBFO and WIPP subject matter experts to help guide an upcoming information request in support of a DNFSB review of lightning protection systems at WIPP.

Joint Health & Safety Committee. Salado Isolation Mining Contractors (SIMCO) established a New Joint Health & Safety Committee (HSC) and Area Subcommittees. The HSC is comprised of volunteer WIPP employees, management, and subcontractor personnel. They will meet monthly to review safety observations, safety concerns, develop corrective actions, and monitor progress of issue resolution. The HSC subcommittee leads will share safety observations, concerns, activities, and recommendations from their respective subcommittees to the HSC Board to enhance communication and collaboration across the site, foster continuous safety improvement and promote positive safety behaviors. HSC Board members will also perform quarterly HSC walkdowns of work sites and facilities.

Safety Significant Confinement Ventilation System–Readiness: In December, a Management Self-Assessment team completed Phase-1 of their review of SSCVS. This was performed by an external team of subject matter experts. The team focused their review in identifying gaps in the flow down of safety management program requirements affected by the SSCVS modification. The team identified four prestart findings, notably: (1) inadequately defined starting points for system configuration; (2) missing criteria to confirm equipment operability, procedure viability, and operator proficiency prior to release for unrestricted operations; and (3) the need to include SSCVS safety significant software in the software quality assurance plan and in instrumentation configuration management.

SIMCO Operations has extended their 90-day run of the facility prior to readiness activities by one week, to January 29 (see WIPP Monthly for October 2024).