

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

March 7, 2025

TO: Acting Technical Director
FROM: WIPP Cognizant Engineer
SUBJECT: Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) Report for February 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 February 3 through 5, DNFSB cognizant engineers were on-site to observe conduct of maintenance during the site's annual outage period, receive status updates on the Safety Significant Confinement Ventilation System (SSCVS) project, and meet with Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO) management. The staff team attended daily work planning meetings, pre-job briefings, and post-job briefings, as well as observed maintenance activities on differential pressure gauges and filter dampers. The staff team and the Nuclear Material Processing and Stabilization Associate Technical Director met with CBFO management to share the staff team's observations of maintenance at the site, discuss complex-wide waste stream projections and WIPP's waste disposition capacities, and provide a projected timeline of DNFSB staff review activities at WIPP this year.

On February 20, DNFSB staff observed Phase-II of the SSCVS Management Self-Assessment out-brief.

Safety Significant Confinement Ventilation System–Construction: On February 6, the wye, the last fitting to tie-in the underground to the new SSCVS ventilation system, was installed with a blank flange to the SSCVS. During the installation, there were issues in mating the new wye connection due to salt loading causing deformation in the existing exhaust ducting. To correct the mating issue, facility personnel cut into and removed a portion of the new wye ducting and flexed it into position. Workers then sealed the cut portion with steel plates and welds.

Safety Significant Confinement Ventilation System–Readiness: On February 20, a Management Self-Assessment team concluded Phase-II of their review of SSCVS and provided a briefing to site personnel regarding their preliminary conclusions. The team identified seven pre-start findings and 22 opportunities for improvement. The pre-start findings related to the number of work packages developed vs. completed for MSA Phase-II, inconsistent system design documentation regarding the alarm set point of the 2nd stage high-efficiency particulate air bank pressure differential indicating transmitter, and issues with field equipment labeling. Salado Isolation Mining Contractors (SIMCO) is developing corrective actions for MSA Phase-II findings, which will be completed prior to the startup of the system.

New Mexico Environment Department: Personnel from the New Mexico Environment Department were on-site February 10 to conduct inspections on buried fuel storage tanks. The inspectors noted that spill prevention equipment was not being tested or maintained as required. Following the inspection, SIMCO temporarily closed and emptied each tank. There were no noted impacts to workers or the environment. SIMCO recently installed a new tank to replace the underground tank system.