

## DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

September 5, 2025

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

**DNFSB Staff Activity.** The Associate Technical Director for Nuclear Materials Processing & Stabilization, the WIPP site cognizant engineer, and the National Transuranic Waste Program cognizant engineer were on-site from August 26 to 27, 2025. The staff team visited surface facilities including the Underground Ventilation System (UVS), waste handling building, Central Monitoring Room (CMR), fire pump house, utility shaft, air intake shaft, waste shaft, and salt handling shaft. The staff team also visited underground facilities including the active waste emplacement panel, salt pocket refurbishment project area, and the connection point where the West Mains are being joined with the utility shaft drifts. Additionally, the staff team met with Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO) and Salado Isolation Mining Contractors, LLC (SIMCO) management to discuss ongoing activities, challenges, and planned upgrades at WIPP. The staff team also attended National TRU Program meetings, discussed challenges in dispositioning certain waste streams, and toured the TRANSCOM communications center, DOE's satellite tracking and communications facility for monitoring radioactive material shipments. Additionally, the cognizant engineers held weekly meetings to maintain awareness of mining and waste handling activities.

**Counterweight Breaks Off of Backdraft Damper.** On August 14, 2025, one of the UVS fan #2 backdraft damper counterweights sheared and fell approximately 25 feet to the fan room floor. The counterweight weighs approximately 35 pounds. Facility personnel heard the impact and immediately notified the Facility Operations Manager and the CMR. Facility operations personnel secured the fan, installed barricades, and initiated an investigation into the incident. SIMCO personnel categorized the event as a near miss and submitted an entry into DOE's Occurrence Reporting and Processing System (ORPS) [EM-CBFO--SIMC-WIPP-2025-0012]. SIMCO personnel are evaluating an engineered approach to mitigate falling object hazards, which may include tethering the counterweights or installing netting beneath.

**Failure to Report Waste Hoist Lilly Gear Fault.** On August 17, 2025, the waste hoist tripped due to a lilly gear fault while transporting facility personnel to the surface. The lilly controller is a safety device that identifies where the hoist is in the shaft and initiates a stop when the hoist speed exceeds predefined limits. Facility personnel reset the hoist system and continued to bring personnel to the surface. The hoist continued to operate the remainder of the day without incident; however, proper procedure would have been to take the hoist out of service to investigate the fault and implement corrective measures before using the hoist again. On August 18, 2025, SIMCO management learned of the incident, took the hoist out-of-service, and updated the CMR logbook. SIMCO management categorized the event as a management concern and submitted an entry into ORPS [EM-CBFO--SIMC-WIPP-2025-0013].

**Mining Progress.** On August 25, 2025, mining personnel successfully joined the first West Main drift with the adjacent utility shaft drift. The two areas will be separated with mesh fencing and brattice cloth to isolate airflow from the utility shaft until the two areas are formally integrated.