

## DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

November 7, 2025

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

**DNFSB Staff Activity.** The DNFSB WIPP site cognizant engineer completed Underground Miner Training at Southeastern New Mexico College in Carlsbad, NM, to attain unescorted access to WIPP's underground for routine oversight. Additionally, the cognizant engineer held weekly meetings to maintain awareness of mining and waste handling activities.

**Limiting Conditions for Operation (LCO).** On October 7, 2025, personnel at Idaho National Laboratory (INL) notified Salado Isolation Mining Contractors, LLC (SIMCO) and DOE Carlsbad Field Office personnel that they identified traces of dichloroacetylene gas in the headspace of certified Sludge Repackaging Project (SRP) containers (see INL Monthly for October 2025). Dichloroacetylene is a shock-sensitive, highly reactive, and carcinogenic chemical. At the time, SRP containers were actively being shipped to WIPP. On October 7, 2025, SIMCO personnel entered the LCO related to receiving drums that could potentially result in internal energetic events. LCO actions included suspending waste handling activities and limiting entry into the affected areas, which included the parking area unit, the waste handling building, and the active emplacement room. Additionally, INL personnel suspended SRP waste stream shipments to WIPP.

On October 13, 2025, Central Characterization Program personnel published a white paper, *Evaluation of Dichloroacetylene in Containers from Idaho National Laboratory*, that analyzed the toxicity, flammability, and reactivity hazards introduced by dichloroacetylene. The white paper concluded that none of the SRP containers in the active emplacement room or the waste handling building contained dichloroacetylene, as confirmed through flammable gas analysis. The paper further concluded that incidental quantities of dichloroacetylene do not pose a toxicity concern, do not exceed the lower explosive limit, are not reactive, and are in a stable form. Following this publication, SIMCO personnel exited the LCO and resumed normal operations. DNFSB staff are evaluating the technical basis presented in the white paper.

**Waste Handling Stop Work Order.** During the last week of October, WIPP operations experienced a series of procedural non-compliances that led SIMCO management to initiate a formal stop work for waste handling operations. On October 29, 2025, waste handling technicians incorrectly marked steps in a technical procedure as complete, which were not actually completed in practice. Although workers on the following shift notified the shift supervisor, the central monitoring room was not immediately notified, as required. In a separate event on the same day, waste handling personnel failed to enter the correct facility mode prior to processing special operations waste. Subsequently, facility personnel entered the proper mode and management initiated a formal pause work for contact-handled waste operations. On October 30, 2025, waste handling technicians discovered a helium leak test tag in the improper location. The waste handling manager notified the central monitoring room and initiated a pause work.

SIMCO personnel are implementing a recovery plan, which includes increased leadership oversight, re-briefing all technicians and supervisors on procedural adherence principles, and revalidating all in-progress procedures. SIMCO management resumed waste handling operations on November 4, 2025.