

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

January 9, 2026

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

DNFSB Staff Activity. The WIPP and National Transuranic (TRU) Waste Program cognizant engineers were on site December 8–10, 2025, to observe ongoing operations, walk down defense nuclear facilities, and meet with Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO) and Salado Isolation Mining Contractors, LLC (SIMCO) personnel. Surface facility walkdowns included the New Filter Building (NFB) and the Waste Handling Building. Underground facility walkdowns included the active waste emplacement panel, the flow path downstream of the waste face, the salt pocket refurbishment project area, and the newly mined utility shaft drifts. Additionally, the staff team held discussions with CBFO and SIMCO personnel regarding their evaluation of the toxicity, flammability, and reactivity hazards introduced by dichloroacetylene from Idaho National Laboratory Sludge Repackaging Project containers (see WIPP Monthly for October 2025). During this meeting, site personnel provided additional detail and clarification regarding the justification for exiting the limiting conditions of operation and resuming waste operations. The staff team then met with the CBFO manager to discuss complex-wide waste stream projections, WIPP’s waste disposition capacities, and the status of future National TRU Program initiatives.

During the walkdown of the NFB, the WIPP cognizant engineer identified a hole in flexible ducting on the inlet of high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter #13, which was in service at the time of the discovery. The approximately 1-inch-diameter hole was located on the safety-significant confinement side of the system (i.e., before HEPA filtration). During a prior visit in April 2025, the cognizant engineer identified several smaller holes on the pressure-boundary side of this system (i.e., after HEPA filtration). The staff team relayed the observation to a nuclear facility operations manager, who verified the condition and notified the central monitoring room, relevant system engineers, and radiological control technicians. Following this discovery, SIMCO personnel placed the affected filter bank out of service, performed an extent-of-condition review, and commenced a more thorough evaluation of the situation. SIMCO personnel elected not to declare a potential inadequacy of the safety analysis, as they determined that minor in-leakage into the system is evaluated through documented engineering analyses. SIMCO personnel will, however, begin the unreviewed safety question process as part of evaluating necessary repair work activities. DNFSB staff are evaluating the facility response to this issue and the existing system analyses.

Federal Oversight. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) personnel conducted inspections at WIPP in September 2025 with a focus on evaluating the effectiveness of waste monitoring systems, including geotechnical, radiological, and hydrological systems. The inspection team also verified the adequacy of waste tracking by comparing recently emplaced waste containers against parameters detailed in the waste data system. On December 17, 2025, the EPA transmitted a letter to CBFO documenting completion of its inspections with satisfactory conclusions.

In October 2025, Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) personnel conducted a quarterly inspection. MSHA issued 23 citations, of which 15 were in the underground, 7 were within surface facilities, and 1 was for the utility shaft project. One citation was designated as significant or substantial and related to loose material on the mine walls, which was promptly remedied by scaling. Twenty of the 23 citations have been addressed and remedied. SIMCO personnel have mitigated the remaining three citations and are awaiting input from MSHA for final closure.