

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

April 3, 2026

Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) Cognizant Engineer Report for March 2026

DNFSB Staff Activity: The WIPP cognizant engineer was on site during March 3–4, 2026, to observe a safety basis development workshop, walk down defense nuclear facilities, and meet with Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO) and Salado Isolation Mining Contractors, LLC (SIMCO) management personnel. Additionally, the WIPP and National Transuranic Waste Program cognizant engineers held periodic meetings to maintain awareness of mining and waste handling activities.

Waste Hoist Motor Replacement: On February 27, 2026, SIMCO maintenance personnel completed replacement of the waste hoist motor ahead of schedule. SIMCO management plans to ship the old motor to General Electric for refurbishment, which will include replacing the motor winding insulators. Once completed, SIMCO management plans to retain the original motor as a ready spare.

Safety Basis Workshop: During March 2–3, 2026, the Department of Energy Office of Environmental Management’s Chief of Nuclear Safety, CBFO management, and SIMCO safety basis and operations personnel held a safety basis workshop to discuss updating the site’s technical safety requirements to better align with the site operating posture. Proposed changes included redefining container integrity criteria, updating material-at-risk limit tables, and simplifying shipment receipt inspections. DNFSB staff continue to follow DOE’s efforts to update the WIPP safety basis.

New Filter Building (NFB): On March 3, 2026, SIMCO maintenance personnel replaced the flexible ducting expansion joint on the inlet of high-efficiency particulate air filter #13 and returned the filter bank to service. This filter was out of service due to a hole, identified by the WIPP cognizant engineer during a previous walkdown (see WIPP Monthly for December 2025).

On March 4, 2026, during a walkdown of the NFB, the WIPP cognizant engineer identified yellowing of domestic water lines feeding various facility systems. The domestic water lines consist of Uponor AquaPEX® piping, a polyethylene-based material. Yellowing is a visual indication of potential material degradation, which could be due to excess exposure to ultraviolet radiation, thermal oxidation, or chemical exposure. The cognizant engineer communicated the observed condition to a CBFO contract facility representative, who noted and initiated a report on the issue for evaluation. Though not a credited safety system, the cooling water system is required for operation of the NFB exhaust fans.

Annual Outage Complete: On March 18, 2026, SIMCO personnel completed the annual maintenance outage during which they performed 148 critical work activities, most notably replacing the 1980s-era waste hoist motor and electrical substation 3. Following completion, SIMCO waste handling personnel resumed processing and downloading waste.