

## DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

September 6, 2024

**TO:** Timothy J. Dwyer, Technical Director  
**FROM:** Erin A. McCullough, Cognizant Engineer  
**SUBJECT:** Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) Report for August 2024

**DNFSB Staff Activity.** The Board's WIPP cognizant engineer held weekly meetings to maintain awareness of mining and waste handling activities. On August 26, 2024, the Board's staff communicated preliminary observations regarding the safety impacts of the WIPP Salt Handling Shaft Review to the Department of Energy Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO).

**WIPP Fire Battalion Concerns.** In preparation for the joint United Steel Worker and Department of Energy Office of Enterprise Assessment visit in June (see WIPP Report for June 2024), WIPP personnel organized a list of concerns about the WIPP Fire Department. The document identified specific opportunities for improvement regarding infrastructure, training, staffing, underground medical response, and equipment. Throughout July and August, the Board's cognizant engineer met with Salado Isolation Mining Contractor, LLC (SIMCO) leaders to discuss progress documenting, investigating, and mitigating these concerns. The Board's staff will continue following this topic.

**Lockout Tagout (LO/TO) Reportable Event.** On July 17, 2024, the outage manager instructed the day crew not to perform a LO/TO at the WIPP Plant Substation until the next morning, since he wanted to be present during the LO/TO due to its complexity. During shift turnover, the facility operations night crew was not made aware of this plan. The next morning, the outage manager recognized that the LO/TO was performed and subsequently walked down the Plant Substation to ensure that the work was correct. The outage manager identified five issues: one tag was in the wrong location and four devices (used to lock the breaker in the open position) were incorrectly installed. However, the outage manager did not report the discrepancies to WIPP management until two weeks later. The event investigation process occurred throughout early August. On August 15, 2024, SIMCO reported the event to the DOE Office of Environmental Management through the Occurrence Reporting and Processing System as a management concern. The Board's staff are concerned about both the level of proficiency in the LO/TO program and substantial delay in reporting this issue.

**CBFO Issue Report for Industrial Safety Program.** On August 22, 2024, the CBFO Safety Programs Division Director submitted an issue report documenting conditions that are contrary to the Personal Protective Equipment aspect of the WIPP Industrial Safety Program. The issue description noted that multiple personnel in the underground have been observed not wearing the required reflective attire, safety glasses, hardhats, or W-65 self-rescue device. These observations apply to multiple departments, including Waste Handling, Mine Operations, and Hoisting. In some instances, line managers did not adhere to the program requirements. Along with other recent safety culture challenges (see WIPP reports for March through June 2024), the Board's staff is concerned these events may indicate that a culture of complacency could be developing at WIPP.