

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

June 4, 2021

TO: Christopher J. Roscetti, Technical Director
FROM: Alexander Velazquez-Lozada, Cognizant Engineer
SUBJECT: Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) Report for May 2021

DNFSB Staff Activity. The Board's staff participated in regular conference calls to maintain cognizance of site activities.

Response during COVID-19. While following CDC guidance, WIPP personnel continue to maximize the use of telework. Work activities are divided into three categories to assign work stations for associated personnel: site-critical work activities requiring key duties to be performed on site; site-flexible work activities requiring some key duties to be performed on site; and site-optional work activities, where most or all activities can be performed remotely. WIPP's procedure for Fitness for Duty was updated to require employees to monitor themselves each day prior leaving for work and to not report to work if any COVID-19 symptoms are present. WIPP received waste at an average rate of five shipments per week and by the end of this reporting period, WIPP had increased to six shipments per week.

Waste Management. Nuclear Waste Partnership, LLC (NWP), reported a potential violation of Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) certificates of compliance (CoC) for TRUPACT-II and HalfPACT waste shipping containers. The CoCs require the weights of the payloads to be verified using a calibrated scale. During an evaluation to verify how the total weights of the payload assemblies have been calculated for certified contact handled (CH) transuranic (TRU) waste payloads, NWP discovered that generator sites were calculating overpack weights by picking a nominal weight value archived in the Waste Data System software and adding 5% to that value. Although this might yield conservative values, the CoC requirement is that all payload containers, including dunnage, shall be weighed using a calibrated scale and recorded. According to NWP personnel, the weights archived in the database of the payload containers being overpacked have been obtained using a calibrated scale in accordance with the CH-TRU Waste Authorized Methods for Payload Control (CH-TRAMPAC). In addition, NWP confirmed that there have been no occurrences of certified shipments that have exceeded the allowable payload weights for TRUPACT-II or HalfPACT Type B packages. WIPP notified NRC and is conducting an extent of condition review.

Fire Protection. During a routine oversight activity, CBFO identified opportunities to improve the WIPP Fire Protection Program Plan to better define roving fire watch requirements. WIPP also identified opportunities to improve the fire watch procedure to include guidance for planning and developing the route for roving fire watch inspectors. The current fire watch procedure does not require prioritizing buildings during roving fire watch activities involving multiple buildings. The procedure does not offer guidance for prioritizing buildings. Additionally, during a recent fire watch observation, many buildings were only partially searched, some buildings were not entered and searched, and some rooms and areas in buildings were locked and inaccessible. The guidance should prioritize high hazard facilities, Technical Safety Requirements, and other significant buildings affecting work safety and/or site mission.