

## DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

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

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

**Waste Handling.** On December 10<sup>th</sup>, Nuclear Waste Partnership, LLC (NWP), paused waste handling activities after the Waste Handling Manager and Waste Handling Engineer observed operators not following the appropriate steps in the procedures to assemble an empty HalfPACT waste container at the Waste Handling Building. The manager notified the Central Monitoring Room (CMR) and started discussing directions to recover from a missed procedural step. NWP personnel noted that the pre-job briefing was not specific to HalfPACT packaging and assembly. NWP plans to further evaluate the procedure to determine its accuracy and adequacy as well as evaluate operators' knowledge of the procedures and their responsibilities. NWP resumed waste handling activities on December 15<sup>th</sup>.

In a separate event, early this month, NWP initiated a non-compliance-report after identifying that a container from Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) had been certified for shipment to WIPP under an incorrect waste type. NWP is evaluating the extent of condition for additional containers under this waste stream and also investigating the incorrect waste type assignment.

The Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO) reported that during the last week of November, NWP personnel stopped work after discovering that an Inner Containment Vessel ventilation port plug was missing from a TRUPACT shipping container that had originated at LANL. The Waste Handling Manager immediately notified the CMR. A Waste Handler replaced the missing ventilation port plug with a spare and after an evaluation, an NWP engineer authorized continuation of processing of the shipping container. The TRUPACT Certificate of Compliance issued by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission requires a ventilation port and plug. The ventilation port is used to sample and vent the payload cavity during unloading operations. NWP continues evaluating this incident.

**Conduct of Operations.** During the month of December, WIPP reported several incidents involving vehicles in the underground. On November 30<sup>th</sup>, an unloaded transporter was backing up into a cutout when it impacted another transporter that was parked in proximity to the intersection. On December 9<sup>th</sup>, another transporter that was relocating an empty pallet impacted a wall while attempting to travel around a parked cart. The NWP Operations Manager implemented a series of compensatory actions that included requiring: (1) a spotter for all mobile equipment operations, (2) an engineer to supervise activities involving the movement of mobile equipment, and (3) a manager to ensure the removal of unnecessary or excessive equipment in the transport path prior to downloading or emplacing waste. NWP reports did not identify any injuries to personnel and these incidents did not result in a radiological release. However, these incidents demonstrated a lack of attention to detail, which increases the likelihood that postulated incidents with radiological consequences will occur.