

## DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

July 7, 2023

**TO:** Katherine R. Herrera, Acting Technical Director  
**FROM:** Alexander Velazquez-Lozada, Cognizant Engineer  
**SUBJECT:** Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) Report for June 2023

**DNFSB Staff Activity.** Two Board's staff members attended the National Transuranic Waste Program's (NTP) Annual User Group Meeting in Carlsbad June 13-15, 2023. The Board's staff also participated in regular conference calls to maintain cognizance of site activities.

**External Dosimetry Program Accreditation.** The former WIPP Management and Operating contractor conducted a second retest of the WIPP external dosimetry program after failing both a periodic test on March 28, 2022, and the first retest on July 20, 2022. Between September and November 2022, the former contractor submitted three new rounds of performance testing as part of the second retest. Effective June 15, 2023, the DOELAP granted accreditation to the WIPP personnel dosimetry program, agreeing that it met the requirements of DOE Standard 1111, *Department of Energy Laboratory Accreditation Program*, and had successfully demonstrated compliance with DOE performance criteria through the second round of retest and a DOELAP on-site assessment. The passing rating for the overall second retest was based on the average of the three rounds of performance testing and satisfactory follow-up on-site assessment. This accreditation is valid until December 14, 2025, and is contingent upon maintaining dosimetry practices consistent with the methodologies established by DOELAP.

**Utility Shaft Project.** The Carlsbad Field Office reported that the subcontractor Harrison-Western Shaft Sinkers reached the underground shaft station ceiling depth and began horizontal blasting to excavate the utility shaft's underground station area.

**Radiological Protection Program.** Salado Isolation Mining Contractors, LLC (SIMCO), reported an abnormal condition in which six radioactive electroplated sealed sources exhibited elevated activity. SIMCO bagged and labeled them, and took the sources out of service. SIMCO surveyed all other sources, instruments, and storage cabinets and found an elevated direct reading on one of the source-jigs/holders used to perform operability check for the continuous air monitors. The source-jig has been successfully decontaminated. Although SIMCO concluded that this abnormal condition does not represent a condition of safety significance, they are further investigating the cause of elevated activity.

**Conduct of Operations.** SIMCO reported that on Friday, June 9, 2023, when a transporter was traveling to Panel 8 to emplace waste, the brakes inadvertently locked up. That caused the payload to shift forward, causing a small dent on a waste drum. SIMCO personnel notified the Central Monitoring Room, work was paused, and the driver put the transporter in a safe configuration. Radiological control technicians performed smears of the drum, placed a portable continuous air monitor downstream of the transporter, and instructed personal to move up-drift. Readings of the smear did not show elevated radiological contamination. SIMCO personnel generated a work package to inspect the brakes and identified that the breaker for the brakes had tripped. The breaker was reset, the transporter was put temporarily back into service to complete emplacement of the waste in Panel 8, and subsequently the transposer was taken out of service.