

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

July 5, 2024

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

DNFSB Staff Activity. During the week of June 24, 2024, the cognizant engineer performed facility walkdowns and discussed safety culture challenges with Department of Energy (DOE) Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO), Salado Isolation Mining Contractors, LLC (SIMCO), and local United Steel Workers (USW) union leaders.

Safety Culture Feedback Sessions. The recent safety stand-down (see WIPP Report for April 2024) helped SIMCO leaders recognize the need to further investigate site personnel's concerns through nine structured safety culture feedback sessions that took place over two days in late May 2024. Site personnel expressed concerns about the unclear plans for addressing aging equipment and infrastructure, lack of training, inadequate work tools, and other topics. Throughout June, SIMCO leaders developed a Conduct of Operations Improvement Plan and collaborative assignments with line management to respond to specific issues that arose in the feedback sessions. The Board's cognizant engineer emphasized to SIMCO leaders the benefits of documenting safety concerns in the contractor's issue management system.

Joint USW Union and DOE Office of Enterprise Assessments Safety Audit. On September 15, 2023, the USW union transmitted a letter to the head of the DOE Office of Environmental Management in Washington, D.C. to express significant concerns with the implementation of the Health and Safety Plan at WIPP. The letter invited a joint USW and DOE audit, which took place June 11-12, 2024. The Board's staff plan to review the forthcoming results.

Issues with Hoist Reliability. On June 14, 2024, the Waste Hoist and Salt Handling Hoist were out of service for unplanned maintenance. When site personnel needed to egress the underground for non-emergency purposes, the Air Intake Hoist controls faulted, leaving eight site personnel without a way to exit for under thirty minutes until they used the Waste Hoist outside of applicable procedures. A series of hoist issues has challenged WIPP throughout 2024 (see WIPP Reports for January and February 2024), although this occurrence was the first in which site personnel would not have had an in-service hoist to egress the mine during an emergency after the Air Intake Hoist controls faulted.

CBFO Oversight for Conduct of Operations. DOE Order 422.1, *Conduct of Operations*, supports integrated safety management programs by requiring sites to establish formal practices and to perform work with controls. The Conduct of Operations Matrix is a site-specific document that provides a crosswalk of applicable site procedures implementing each conduct of operations program element. A facility representative completed a review of the revised WIPP Conduct of Operations Matrix, observing multiple instances in which procedures referenced for specific program elements no longer exist or are not relevant. The review resulted in CBFO withholding formal approval pending additional updates to the Matrix. The Board's staff commends continued oversight efforts on this topic, as recent events (see WIPP Report for May 2024) indicate opportunities for improvement.