

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

August 6, 2021

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

DNFSB Staff Activity. A. Velazquez-Lozada provided routine onsite oversight during the week of July 19th. This was the first in-person visit to the site by the Board's staff since March 2020.

Response during COVID-19. Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO) personnel mostly continue to telework, averaging approximately five personnel on site and one facility representative on-call each day. Due to increases in COVID-19 cases, WIPP reinstated the face-covering mandate for all federal and contractor employees and visitors indoors at the WIPP site/in-town facilities, regardless of vaccination status.

Safety Basis. Nuclear Waste Partnership, LLC (NWP), conducted the Implementation Verification Review along with the Management Self-Assessment of Revision 7 to the Documented Safety Analysis (DSA)/Technical Safety Requirements (TSR) that support the restart of WIPP's 700C Fan. The Board's staff observed selected interviews that were conducted for the IVR/MSA and noted that not all changes were incorporated in the procedures; not all personnel have been trained on the safety basis changes; and some personnel were not completely familiar with the changes and associated required reading. At the conclusion of the IVR, the IVR team lead reported one open pre-start finding and two findings that were corrected during the review. The pre-start finding is related to a potential unmitigated accident—in the event of a radiological release in the Contact Handled Bay, an existing ventilation pathway to the waste shaft could allow contaminated air to join the air-flow driven by the unfiltered 700C Fan. The two findings corrected during the review were related to the observations discussed above. The MSA was completed on July 31st and the MSA lead scheduled an outbriefing on August 2nd. The Contractor Readiness Assessment is scheduled to start on August 9th.

Ground Control. NWP paused waste emplacement due to floor conditions along the waste travel path to Panel 7. This was identified during a walkdown conducted by NWP waste handlers and representatives of the United Steel Workers Union. The uneven floor could potentially affect the forklift while it is carrying waste to the waste face of Panel 7. NWP is currently working to improve the floor conditions.

An expected roof fall occurred between July 10th and 11th in Room 6 of Panel 7. This roof fall was monitored closely using remote instrumentation. The roof fall occurred in a prohibited access area and it did not affect any other areas or underground operations. Instrumentation in rooms 5, 3, 2, and 1 of Panel 7 remain operational.

Conduct of Operations. NWP performed a Safety Stand Down due to an observed negative trend in conduct of operations-related incidents during the last two months. These incidents have occurred in the underground as well as at the surface. Although none of these incidents occurred near waste, resulted in a radiological release, or in an inadvertent radiation exposure, they could be precursors to a potential accident with radiological consequences resulting from human errors.