



**Department of Energy**  
Albuquerque Operations Office  
P.O. Box 5400  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87115

*D.R. Beswaine*

Dear Friend:

Enclosed is a copy of the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) final Supplement to the Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). The final SEIS was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended. The U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, was a cooperating agency in its preparation.

In October 1980, DOE issued the WIPP Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) (DOE/EIS-0026). The Record of Decision (ROD) (46 FR 9126, January 28, 1981) documented DOE's decision to proceed with the phased construction and operation of WIPP at the Los Medanos site near Carlsbad, New Mexico. On February 17, 1989, DOE announced its plans to prepare a supplement to the FEIS (54 FR 7251) and evaluate the environmental impacts associated with new information and changes in the proposed action since the ROD was issued. The new information and changes in the proposed action analyzed in the SEIS include changes in the transuranic (TRU) waste inventory, consideration of the hazardous chemical constituents in the TRU waste, modification and refinement of the system for the transportation of TRU waste to WIPP, modification of the Test Phase, and changes in the understanding of the hydrogeological characteristics of the WIPP site.

The SEIS evaluates and compares the Proposed Action and two alternatives. The Proposed Action is to proceed with a phased approach to the development of WIPP as a research and development facility to demonstrate the safe disposal of post-1970, defense-generated TRU waste. Full operation of WIPP would be preceded by a Test Phase of approximately five years during which time certain tests and an operations demonstration would be carried out. The elements of the Test Phase continue to evolve. The DOE, in December 1989, issued a draft final Test Phase plan that focuses on tests that would be conducted to reduce uncertainties associated with the prediction of natural processes that might affect long-term performance of the underground waste repository. Results of these tests would be used to assess the ability of WIPP to meet applicable Federal standards for the long-term protection of the public and the environment from disposal of TRU waste and to confirm compliance with Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) Land Disposal Restrictions

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and other regulatory requirements. The operations demonstration would be conducted to show the ability of the TRU waste management system to certify, package, transport, and emplace TRU waste in WIPP safely and efficiently.

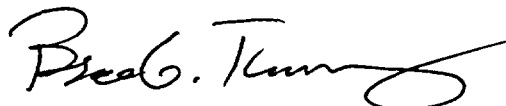
Waste requirements for any operations demonstration remain uncertain. A separate document would be developed to describe in detail the operations demonstration following DOE's decision as to scope and timing of the demonstration. The DOE will issue another SEIS at the conclusion of the Test Phase and prior to a decision to proceed to the Disposal Phase.

The first alternative is the No Action alternative under which there would be no research and development facility to demonstrate the safe disposal of TRU waste, and TRU waste would continue to be retrievably stored. Storage of newly generated TRU mixed waste would be in conflict with RCRA Land Disposal Restrictions; treatment would be required to avoid such conflict. WIPP would be decommissioned as a waste disposal facility and potentially put to other uses. The second alternative is to conduct only those tests that can be performed without placing waste underground in WIPP until a determination has been made of compliance with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards for TRU waste disposal. The bin-scale tests would be conducted in a specially designed above-ground facility to be constructed at a DOE facility.

On April 21, 1989, DOE published the Draft SEIS and began a 90-day public comment period. In addition to receiving 1,275 written comment documents from individuals, groups, and agencies, DOE conducted public hearings in nine locations: Atlanta, Georgia; Denver, Colorado; Pocatello, Idaho; Pendleton, Oregon; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Santa Fe, New Mexico; Artesia, New Mexico; Odessa, Texas; and Ogden, Utah. The DOE has analyzed all relevant comments, revised the SEIS as appropriate, and prepared a comment-response document.

Copies of the Final SEIS are being provided to members of Congress; the Office of Management and Budget; the DOE Public Information Reading Rooms; many public libraries; and to agencies, organizations, and persons who requested copies. The ROD will be issued no less than 30 days following the announcement by EPA in the Federal Register of the availability of the Final SEIS.

Sincerely,



Bruce G. Twining  
Manager

Enclosure