

The proposed modifications to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) permit by the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) lack justifiable reasoning, either for the benefit of New Mexico's citizens or for environmental sustainability. The proposed changes are inadequately motivated and lack scientific, environmental, or any reasonable justification. They could unnecessarily and irresponsibly impede the nation's efforts to dispose of transuranic nuclear waste safely, as well as harm the state's economy and education system. The proposals, particularly the language requesting the siting of a new waste repository, are not consistent with the NMED's role as a neutral regulatory agency that values science, innovation, collaboration, and compliance. If requests for the creation of a new TRU waste repository are made, they should be based on these core values.

New Mexico has the highest per capita number of PhDs in the United States, largely due to the presence of the nuclear industry. Therefore, devaluing this industry would deny future generations opportunities to work in higher-degreed careers and provide no healthy substitution. Arguments in favor of the proposed modifications, including "not in my backyard" mentality, disregard the opinions of the over 1,000 professionals who safely operate the WIPP site daily and the thousands of accredited scientists who have thoroughly vetted the entire TRU waste disposal process.

The New Mexico government previously relied on expert and scientific recommendations to combat the spread of COVID-19, but the attempt to impede the future of the WIPP site contradicts this stance. Choosing to prioritize irrelevant motives over the experts in our community undermines our commitment to science and innovation.

The State's interest, which could be reasonable, such as prioritizing waste generated within New Mexico, should be pursued through legitimate channels instead of weaponizing issues that are founded on ignorance. The NMED should revisit its proposed modifications and retract those lacking a scientific, innovative, collaborative, and compliant justification.