



SOUTHWEST RESEARCH AND INFORMATION CENTER

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May 31, 2024

Megan McLean
New Mexico Environment Department
2095 Rodeo Park Drive East, Building 1
Santa Fe, NM 87505

via email: megan.mclean@env.nm.gov

RE: WIPP Class 2 Permit Modification Requests – Addition of Four New Shielded Containers and Graded Approach

Dear Megan,

Southwest Research and Information Center (SRIC) provides the following comments on the Class 2 Permit Modification Requests (PMR) that were submitted by the Permittees on March 29, 2024, according to the NMED website.

SRIC notes that it stated numerous concerns about the first shielded container PMR in 2012. SRIC has continuing concerns about the safety of the shielded containers and the impact on operations of WIPP, especially if there is a need to overpack a shielded container. A breach of a shielded container could result in waste of greater than 200 millirem per hour, for which there is no overpack available or approved for use in the Permit.

SRIC appreciates that representatives of the Permittees met in Santa Fe on March 14, 2024 with SRIC and other citizen group representatives to discuss the proposed requests before they were submitted to NMED. However, SRIC expects that for future pre-submittal meetings a draft of the PMR will be made available a week or more prior to the meeting so that the discussion can be more substantive and useful for everyone.

SRIC also believes that if NMED approves the shielded container PMR it should require the Permittees to provide additional information. Such additional information includes:

1. The amounts of RH waste in shielded containers from which sites are expected to be emplaced in Panel 8. On page 8, the PMR states:

Therefore, it is important to optimize the use of shielded containers in Panel 8 to efficiently utilize the disposal space available in the WIPP repository and to facilitate RH TRU inventory reductions at the generator/storage sites.

Such a generalized statement does not provide sufficient information. The Permittees should provide more specific information about the amounts of waste and from which sites they expect to ship such wastes. Such information is desired by SRIC and could be useful for NMED, as well as being appropriate to fully understand the Permittees' need for the additional shielded containers.

2. The renewal permit in Part 4.2.1.4 and 4.2.1.5 places emphasis on the need to prioritize legacy waste, yet that issue is not addressed in the PMR. SRIC believes that the Permittees should state whether or not the priority for use of shielded containers is for legacy RH waste. NMED should inform the Permittees that in future PMRs whether or not legacy waste is prioritized will be required information for a complete PMR.

3. Argonne National Lab has been the primary site using the existing shielded container. Argonne is one of the sites specified for use of the Graded Approach that would not require annual audits. See page 3 of the Graded Approach PMR. SRIC suggests that if Argonne is going to be a major shipper of shielded containers that NMED require annual audits, if the next annual audit plan has the site on a two-year schedule.

4. The "approximate height" of SC-55G2 should be clarified. In the Safety Evaluation Report (SER) page 16 (88 of the PDF), the approximate height is 45.15 inches. On page 17 of the SER and throughout the PMR, the approximate height is 45.75 inches. SRIC believes that the height should be known and consistently stated, and the Permittees should clarify the correct height and explain the discrepancies.

5. On page B-11 of the PMR, Table A2-1, the Facility Transfer Vehicle capacity is increased from 26,000 pounds to 30,000 pounds. The explanation of changes on A-4 states the change but does not actually provide an explanation. The reason for the change apparently is to make it consistent with Table A1-2, which shows that the capacity is 30,000 pounds. In any approval, NMED should note that complete explanation and notify the Permittees that future PMRs should provide complete explanations for proposed changes.

Thank you very much for your careful consideration of, and your response to, these and all other comments submitted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Don Hancock". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Don Hancock

cc: Megan McClean