

June 19, 2026

Hon. James Kenney
Secretary
New Mexico Environment Department
Harold Runnels Building
1190 St. Francis Dr. Suite N4050
Santa Fe, NM 87505

RE: WIPP is Critical to Environmental Cleanup, and Restricting Shipments is Detrimental to the Local, State and National Cleanup Mission

Dear Secretary Kenney,

On behalf of Hanford Communities, I am writing to express our concern that the draft permit modification for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) issued by the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) will slow down and endanger critically important cleanup progress at the Department of Energy's (DOE) Hanford Site near the Tri-Cities, WA, and at other DOE cleanup sites near communities across the country.¹

As background, Hanford Communities was established in 1994 to represent the local governments adjacent to the Hanford Site, including the cities of Richland, West Richland, Pasco, and Kennewick, Benton and Franklin Counties, and the Port of Benton. Combined, we represent a community of over 320,000 people, and the successful cleanup of Hanford is vital to ensuring the long-term protection of our residents and the environment. Given the large volume of transuranic (TRU) waste at Hanford, it is essential that WIPP remain available for disposition of this material.

The last permit by NMED modified less than two (2) years ago addressed the key issues and prioritized legacy waste while ensuring that WIPP could operate efficiently. The 2024 permit seems to be working well and was touted by NMED as "successful negotiations"² and "a Legacy TRU Waste Disposal Plan" was introduced into the permit to define the term "legacy waste" and to work with generator/storage sites and stakeholders to accurately inventory this waste once defined. In addition, Panel 12 will be reserved for legacy waste to the extent practicable.

¹ On April 23, NMED issued a Public Notice announcing a Draft Permit to modify the permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant. <https://hwbdocs.env.nm.gov/Waste%20Isolation%20Pilot%20Plant/260419>.

² See NMED presentation, <https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/RHMC%20091324%20Item%20%20WIPP%20Update%20NMED.pdf>

WIPP is the nation's only deep geologic repository for defense-related TRU waste, making it the linchpin for all cleanup efforts across the entire EM complex. Its continued operation and accessibility to sites across the nation are critical. The facility's mission is crucial, its success is a matter of record, and its continued operation – in alignment with the original submission – is essential to our nation's ability to move forward with cleaning up every site across the complex and fulfilling the legal and moral obligations to the nation's frontline cleanup communities, including Los Alamos. The WIPP facility has assisted in the remediation of 22 DOE sites of legacy TRU waste since operations began.

It is important to continue and accelerate shipping TRU waste from Los Alamos National Laboratory as well as Idaho, Washington, Nevada, California, Tennessee, South Carolina, Illinois and other sites. Modifications restricting WIPP's ability to accept shipments from across the EM complex could weaken WIPP's operations and threaten jobs at WIPP. Reducing shipments to WIPP could have a negative impact on the WIPP facility, potentially disrupting WIPP's operations, to the detriment of EM sites across the country and their neighboring communities.

The current permit is new (2024) and adequately addresses the prioritization of legacy waste across the country and helps to address national environmental cleanup and security concerns. We request that NMED continues to work with communities and local governments under the current permit for WIPP.

Please contact Hanford Communities' Executive Director, David Reeploeg, at dreeploeg@hanfordcommunities.org or (509) 205-1760 if you have questions or there is any additional information we can provide.

Sincerely,



Chuck Torelli
Chair, Hanford Communities
Mayor Pro-Tem, City of Kennewick, WA