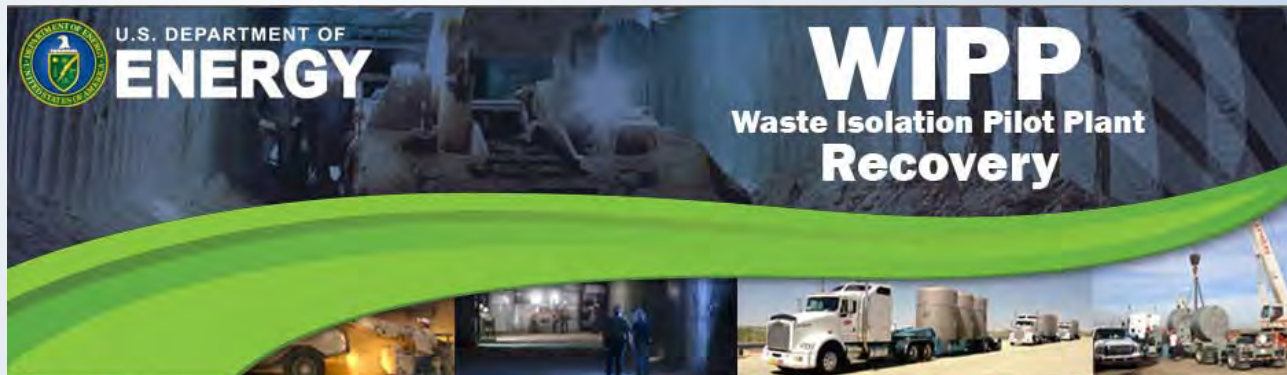


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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

WIPP
Waste Isolation Pilot Plant
Recovery

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WIPP

The nation's only deep geologic repository for nuclear waste

The U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) is a deep geologic repository for permanent disposal of a specific type of waste that is the byproduct of the nation's nuclear defense program.

WIPP is the nation's only repository for the disposal of nuclear waste known as transuranic, or TRU, waste. It consists of clothing, tools, rags, residues, debris, soil and other items contaminated with small amounts of plutonium and other man-made radioactive elements. Disposal of transuranic waste is critical to the cleanup of Cold War nuclear production sites. Waste from DOE sites around the country is sent to WIPP for permanent disposal.

TRU waste is categorized as "contact-handled" or "remote-handled" based on the amount of radiation dose measured at the surface of the waste container. Contact-handled waste has a radiation dose rate not greater than 200 millirem (mrem) per hour, while remote-handled waste can have a dose rate up to 1,000 rem per hour. About 96 percent of the waste to be disposed at WIPP is contact-handled.

TRU waste is long-lived and has to be isolated to protect public health and the environment. Deep geologic disposal in salt beds was chosen because the salt is free of flowing water, easily mined, impermeable and geologically stable. Salt rock also naturally seals fractures and closes openings.