

WIPP AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) is located 26 miles southeast of Carlsbad, New Mexico in southeastern New Mexico. Other neighboring communities include Lovington, Hobbs and Loving, New Mexico.

In March 1983, the Site and Preliminary Design Validation (SPDV) phase of the project was completed. Full scale facility construction began in July of that year. Overall site construction is scheduled to be complete in December 1986. Construction completion will be followed by pre-operational and safety check-out in 1987, prior to receiving the first nuclear waste which is targeted for receipt on or after October 1988.

WIPP has had a significant impact on the local communities. Many local people have been hired by the Department of Energy (DOE), Westinghouse Electric, and U. S. Army Corps of Engineers contractors, as well as associated sub-contractors. As of December 31, 1985, 64% of the 643 people working at WIPP were hired from an 80-mile or less radius of the WIPP site.

The majority of local residents support WIPP. As declining potash and mining industries negatively impacted the economic condition of Southeastern New Mexico, WIPP brought jobs and new business opportunities to the area.

WIPP needs the support of the local area to insure its continued success. The DOE has taken numerous initiatives to enhance WIPP's relationship with the local communities. Some of these initiatives include:

1. Priority to local hiring
2. Environmental monitoring programs
3. Cooperative Junior College courses
4. DOE WIPP Manager's monthly meetings
5. Monthly briefings and reporting to the State's Radioactive Materials Committee
6. TRUPACT procurement
7. Semi-annual Open House at the WIPP site
8. Local Speaker's Bureau
9. Mutual support agreements with local law enforcement, medical and governmental agencies
10. Annual WIPP Press Day
11. Exhibits and displays at locally-hosted fairs and home shows
12. Annual WIPP Educator's Day
13. WIPP participation in civic Business Development Councils
14. Active and ongoing employee integration with communities through promoting participation in civic functions

As WIPP becomes operational in 1988 the continued local support will be a key ingredient to the successful demonstration of WIPP.

WIPP BACKGROUND

Authorized by Public Law 96-164, the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) is a defense activity of the U. S. Department of Energy (DOE) for the express purpose of providing a research and development facility to demonstrate the safe disposal of radioactive wastes resulting from the defense activities and programs of the United States, exempted from regulation by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Certain radioactive wastes (called transuranic or TRU) that are byproducts of defense activities are scheduled for permanent burial at WIPP.

laterally for hundreds of miles in all directions of the site. The excavated horizon for storage of the waste is at a depth of 2150 feet, or approximately in the center of the salt formation.

PROJECT INITIATION

Geologic exploration and facility design began in 1975, and by mid-1978 the Department of Energy (DOE) opened an office in Carlsbad, the closest community to the then-proposed facility. By April 1979 the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was released. The DEIS was revised after public hearings and receipt of written comments, and the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) was released in October 1980.

The site is located amidst the Permian Salt Basin, a 3000-foot thick salt formation which extends

By January 1981, the DOE issued its Executive Record of Decision allowing the project to proceed. Actual construction was underway by mid-1981 when the Bureau of Land Management and DOE signed an agreement allowing use of the Federally-owned land.

During the period between geologic exploration and the Department's Executive Record of Decision -- a span of six years -- the project experienced the birth and growth of self-identification within the surrounding communities. Faced with indecisive public opinion concerning the handling of radioactivity in southeastern New Mexico, Department officials began an integration of community resources and Departmental initiatives to battle the "waste dump" image fostered by opponents of the project.

Citizens of the surrounding communities of the project site, though slightly apprehensive of federal presence in the area, were mostly quick to support project efforts while simultaneously assuring technical issues were answered as they arose. While in Carlsbad the history of the potash industry had been found to provide a major portion of employment in the community, the closings of several potash mines further convinced community leaders alternate sources for economic growth were in order. Thus began what would soon flourish into a long-standing partnership between project officials and citizens of southeastern New Mexico -- with the mutual objectives of project completion and economic stability at hand.

Despite outspoken support by local leaders, there came organized unrest by strong opponents of WIPP. It was soon speculated, however, opponent organizations were not geographically related to the project. With this belief in mind, the local Carlsbad newspaper sought to verify community support by printing an October 1978 editorial asking readers whether they were in favor of, or opposed to, WIPP. The results of the opinion poll, published two weeks later, showed that: of 413 responses, 300 (or 72.6%) indicated support for the project; 87 (or 21%) opposed; and 26 (or 6.4%) selected a no-opinion option.

By 1979 and 1980, however, anti-WIPP rallies had been held in nearby Loving and Carlsbad. Though an anti-nuclear sentiment arose among small groups in the area, local civic leaders persisted in their support of the project becoming a reality. During public hearings on the project in 1980, community leaders and WIPP officials worked jointly in assuring the broad nature and scope of operations at WIPP were accurately and candidly portrayed to the public-at-large. Furthermore, leaders focused on WIPP officials as a community resource in the potential to foster economic growth in the surrounding areas. This joint cooperation and support contributed greatly to the initiation of WIPP's first construction phase in July 1981.

SPDV PHASE

The first phase of construction of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant was termed the Site and Preliminary Design Validation (SPDV) Phase, the purpose of which was to confirm that the subsurface geology was consistent with prior expectations based on interpretation of surface investigations.

During the two-year SPDV phase, the Carlsbad Department of Development actively devoted further energy to WIPP support on behalf of the community. It was suspected at that time that WIPP had already begun

to pay off in the local economy. It was suggested by Department of Development officials that some of the smaller businesses beginning to move to the Carlsbad area had done so to take advantage of the anticipated "economic boom" if WIPP became a reality.

The SPDV phase, however, was witness to further expressions of anti-WIPP sentiment being voiced. On September 7, 1981, a group of 20 protesters voiced their opposition to construction of the project by a demonstration of civil disobedience on the WIPP site proper. In October, the protesters were found guilty of criminal trespass and sentenced to pay fines. This incident was, however, the last such disruptive incident of opposition to the project.

Project activities and community support progressed smoothly through the completion of the Site and Preliminary Design Validation Phase in March 1983.

FULL FACILITY CONSTRUCTION

The second phase of construction at WIPP is now in progress -- full facility construction. This phase began in 1983 with construction of the exhaust shaft, and the development of the waste shaft and non-radioactive experimental areas. In the ensuing three years through the present, WIPP now finds itself 80% complete toward all construction of the facility. However, the waste storage area will be mined on an as-needed basis during the operation of the facility. Prior to receipt of any waste, the first storage panel will be mined. While waste is being stored in the first panel, the second panel will be mined. This process will continue as storage panels are required.

With all major project activities continuing as planned, WIPP officials have taken a "business as usual" approach to on-going operations, and fostered further management initiatives in adding to the economic impact WIPP has and will continue to have in southeastern New Mexico.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Approximately five years and close to \$100 Million were invested in identifying the WIPP site in New Mexico; and three more years and over \$40 Million were invested in validation of that site. History has shown that the characterization effort supported 2000 jobs in New Mexico with a cash flow of \$100 Million; while validation efforts supported over 2000 jobs in New Mexico with a cash flow of more than \$125 Million.

In March of 1984, the Albuquerque-based Department of Energy and Westinghouse staff began transition to southeastern New Mexico to join the existing staff at the WIPP site. This transition, intended to improve efficiency in management operations of the facility, entailed the move of over 65 professional staff and their families into the surrounding communities, primarily that of Carlsbad.

To further efforts of economic contribution in the area, WIPP staff initiated a series of "procurement workshops" in southeastern New Mexico in April 1984, the purpose of which were to acquaint local business people with the procurement procedures, requirements, and upcoming needs for products and services at WIPP. WIPP personnel have also remained active in participation at various community business seminars throughout the past years.

As of December 31, 1985, total manpower at WIPP reached 643, which was a slight increase of 4.2% since the same time the prior year. Inclusive in this total manpower count are 410 local hires -- those employees hired from an 80-mile or less radius of the site.

Efforts are being made, when possible, to procure items locally for WIPP, or at a minimum within the State of New Mexico. Since construction began in 1981, over \$12 Million in small-value purchases and contracts have been expended in the local communities. For those major contracts which have been let state-wide and out-of-state, a large percentage of subcontracts and labor acquisitions have occurred on a local basis as a result of contractor mobilization into the area.

Financial experts have maintained that the development of WIPP has brought, and will bring further monetary and jobs benefits to New Mexico.

CONTINUED COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The WIPP Project has continued to experience an excellent rapport with New Mexico legislators, as well as community officials and residents. In an effort to further enhance the DOE's commitment to an open exchange of information, a temporary Visitor Center was established at the site for use in scheduled visits. By late 1986, a permanent Visitor Center will be in full operation at the facility.

Open House has been held at the site on a semi-annual basis, and during the year 1985, 1343 visitors were accommodated at the facility. These visitors included numerous foreign countries who have waste disposal concerns similar to the U. S. and have expressed a great deal of interest in the possible applications of WIPP technology in their countries.

Specific Initiatives

The Department of Energy has taken numerous initiatives to further enhance WIPP's relationship with the local communities. Some of the more recent initiatives undertaken are briefly described in the following.

A. Environmental Monitoring Programs

WIPP represents a promising technology for the permanent isolation of radioactive wastes. As such, the DOE has assured that all possible environmental impacts resulting from WIPP have been documented as thoroughly as possible. This documentation has resulted in a carefully formulated program for environmental protection, the goal of which is to obtain the necessary information to protect the health and safety of the public and to preserve the quality of the environment.

In April 1985, the DOE hosted a briefing for numerous Carlsbad city officials and media representatives, the purpose of which was to provide the status of on-going and future "Preoperational Environmental Monitoring Programs" for WIPP. The importance of an effective credible environmental protection program was stressed during the briefing, and was well accepted by the audience in attendance. As a result, the DOE plans to schedule periodic update presentations on this topic for several other southeastern New Mexico community groups in the near future.

B. Cooperative College Courses

In July 1985, officials of the DOE and the New Mexico State University branch in Carlsbad signed a Memorandum of Understanding establishing a two-year academic program at the branch college for Health Physics Technicians. The newly-established program will provide formally trained radiological control personnel for the WIPP facility, as well as qualify individuals for similar positions in other nuclear facilities around the nation.

It is perceived that the establishment of this particular program will greatly enhance employment opportunities within the communities surrounding WIPP. Further, additional cooperative programs are being explored as the need for diversified WIPP staff arises.

C. DOE WIPP Manager Monthly Public Exchange Meetings

On the first Monday of each month, the DOE WIPP Project Manager is available at a downtown Carlsbad location to present project status and answer questions of concerned citizens and visitors. Attendance at these meetings has varied, with some attendees returning about every month. The meetings are informal and every effort is made to create a relaxed atmosphere.

Since proximity of the WIPP site is at times inconvenient to individuals in the Carlsbad area, the monthly meetings have been instrumental in attracting those who have been unable to visit the site for various informational purposes. These public meetings will be continued until after WIPP becomes operational.

D. Monthly Briefings and Reports to the State's Radioactive Materials Committee

The State of New Mexico Radioactive Materials Committee consists of twelve members who are State legislators. The Committee is chaired by Representative James Otts, who is the elected representative from the Carlsbad area. Each month the Committee is given a status update by the DOE WIPP Project Manager or his designated representative.

The monthly forum is used to address significant changes to or unexpected events occurring in the project, and has contributed to increased awareness of project activities by the State-wide legislators involved in the Committee. With the understanding that the public and news media should have access to current information concerning WIPP, state-wide media representatives are continually welcomed at these meetings.

E. TRUPACT Procurement

The Transuranic Package Transporter (TRUPACT) was designed to transport contact-handled transuranic waste from the generation or temporary storage site to WIPP. Current operational planning will require 24 TRUPACT units for the operation of WIPP. Various procurement strategy operations were considered. The strategy selected was evaluated as a strategy that would maximize the opportunities for participation by the local communities.

In early 1985, a decision was made to perform the final assembly of the 24 units at the WIPP site in southeastern New Mexico. This assembly will involve competitive procurement of major TRUPACT parts and sub-assemblies, including final assembly, in the local areas. Development of each of the 24 units involves the fabrication and procurement of several component parts, at a total estimated cost in excess of \$10 Million. Officials estimate the establishment of 60

new jobs in the southeastern New Mexico area over a three-year effort.

To further an exchange of information between project officials and businesses in the area, the first in a series of TRUPACT Procurement Orientations was held in November 1985 in the Carlsbad area. With a focus of exchanging valuable information on all potential TRUPACT procurement possibilities, the orientation was successful in encouraging interested suppliers to pursue the many opportunities involved in TRUPACT throughout the ensuing three years.

F. Mutual Support Agreements

During 1985, numerous support agreements were enacted between WIPP emergency staff and local law enforcement, medical, and governmental agencies. These agreements, which vary in nature, have all had a positive impact on cooperative awareness among the citizens involved in all localities.

As the issue of public health and safety increases with the daily progress of WIPP, one of the more noteworthy support agreements has been related to that of emergency services. During the past year alone, numerous working meetings were held, the objective of which were to generally advise on the capability of emergency services (including medical, fire, and rescue) at the WIPP Project. A major topic of discussion at these meetings has also been interface capabilities and agreements between the WIPP emergency services and the services of other city, county, and state agencies. The public-at-large and media representatives have been invited to and attended the various meetings held.

G. Annual WIPP Educator's Day

To further the dissemination of information on WIPP within the Carlsbad area, an "Educator's Day" was planned and held during 1985. The program involved approximately 100 teachers in the area, and consisted of a thorough site orientation and visit. Additionally, a related program was enacted to orient various Science teachers of the Carlsbad Municipal School system on WIPP activities.

The success of this program has led to plans for its continuation on an annual basis in the Carlsbad area, with potential expansion to the entire southeastern New Mexico area.

H. Other Activities

Numerous less predominant, yet important, activities involving community and project cooperation have been focused on during recent years. Events such as Open House and availability of a WIPP Speakers Bureau have had a positive effect on enhancing the project's relationship with the communities involved. Additionally, active WIPP involvement in localized business development councils, as well as community participation in noteworthy events at WIPP, have further led to the positive WIPP/Community integration invaluable to the continued success of project activities.

Project staff have been instrumental in maintaining an excellent community interface by responding to requests for WIPP resources and economic-related ideas frequently made by civic and educational groups, and the public-at-large.

CONCLUSION

Progress on WIPP to date has been excellent, and past years have been witness to numerous significant milestone accomplishments for the project and surrounding communities. The continued success of WIPP exhibits an important project and community partnership to address the nation's nuclear waste disposal issue. In carrying out this commitment, one cannot overemphasize the invaluable support exhibited by the surrounding communities of the project, which are reflected in the standing success of this important Federal endeavor.

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