

WGA Radioactive Waste Transportation Program

What's at stake for the West

- Safe and uneventful transport and disposal of transuranic (TRU) radioactive waste generated by the nuclear defense program.
- Environmental cleanup of the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) defense related facilities and national laboratories.

Background

Since World War II, the federal government has generated TRU waste in the production of nuclear weapons and, more recently, from the cleanup of contaminated DOE sites and national laboratories. While the waste consists primarily of clothing, lab equipment, and other trash, it is contaminated with radioactive plutonium.

In March 1999, the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) located near Carlsbad, New Mexico began accepting shipments of TRU waste for permanent underground storage from five major DOE facilities. It is expected that more than 19,500 shipments will be made to the WIPP repository during its operational life. Twelve western states are affected by these shipments, including New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, California, Utah, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Colorado, Wyoming, and Nebraska.

Western Governors have adopted various policy resolutions since 1992 encouraging DOE to agree to stringent transportation safety procedures for the TRU waste shipments so that the governors' primary objective: safe and uneventful transport of TRU waste could be met. These resolutions also called on DOE to recognize that corridor states must ensure the safety of their residents and respond to any incident which might occur.

To help reduce the chance and severity of an incident, Western Governors established a Technical Advisory Group consisting of officials in affected Western states to work cooperatively with DOE to develop a model transportation program. This joint effort culminated in the development of a Program Implementation Guide, which contains the highest standards for incident prevention and preparedness and is used by both DOE and the states.

In an effort to ensure this transportation program would be fully implemented, DOE and WGA have executed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). The MOA endorses the comprehensive and stringent standards contained in the Program Implementation Guide as well as the regional planning and dialogue process used to develop the transportation program. The regional process has proved to be highly successful as more than 1,400 shipments of TRU waste have been safely delivered to WIPP. The process has also been used on other DOE campaigns, such as Cesium, Nitric Acid, Spent Nuclear Fuel, and Foreign Spent Nuclear Fuel shipments.

WIPP SHIPMENTS (as of December 31, 2002)

| Site | Shipments |
|---|-----------|
| Hanford Site | 13 |
| Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory | 564 |
| Los Alamos National Laboratory | 30 |
| Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site | 778 |
| Savannah River Site | 50 |
| Total to WIPP | 1,435 |

To support the transportation program, WGA administers a grant from DOE totaling about \$2 million each year. Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Nebraska, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming receive financial assistance through this Agreement. New Mexico receives its financial assistance directly from DOE, and Texas receives its financial assistance through the Southern States Energy Board.

Issues for 2003

Beginning in 2005 or 2006, DOE plans to ship TRU waste to WIPP by rail. To help ensure these shipments will be safe and uneventful, the Advisory Group has begun drafting a Rail Transportation Program Implementation Guide (Rail Guide), similar to the one used for truck shipments. The Advisory Group will need policy direction on the approach to be followed for rail transportation of TRU waste, such as whether TRU waste should be shipped using only dedicated trains.

Every three years, WGA policy resolutions automatically sunset unless they have been re-adopted. In 2003, the Policy Resolution on TRU Waste (00-016, U.S. Department of Energy Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) and TRU Waste) will sunset unless it is re-adopted, either with or without amendments. The current resolution expresses the Governors' expectations that DOE will continue to adhere to all provisions of the MOA and follow the strict procedures contained in the WIPP Program Implementation Guide for shipments of TRU waste.

Highway Routes for Shipments to Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

