

DOE Idaho Sends First Offsite Waste to New Mexico

Five months ahead of schedule, Idaho sent the first shipment of offsite radioactive transuranic waste received from the U.S. Department of Energy's Nevada Test Site for permanent disposal at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant near Carlsbad, New Mexico.

The Nevada waste was characterized and validated at the Department's Advanced Mixed Waste Treatment Project, located at its Idaho site. "This first shipment of offsite transuranic waste shows how waste from other locations can be safely, compliantly, and cost effectively handled and prepared," said DOE Idaho Operations Office Deputy Manager Rick Provencher. "It's a testament to the versatility of AMWTP, which continues to be a genuine success story for the Department."



BBWI President
Jeff Mousseau.

More than 150 cubic meters of radioactive waste consisting of contaminated sludge and debris was shipped from the Nevada Test Site to the Idaho site in December 2008 and January 2009.

"AMWTP is a unique facility that has the capacity to receive, characterize, treat, validate and ship transuranic waste from multiple locations," said Jeff Mousseau, president and general manager of Bechtel BWXT Idaho, which operates AMWTP for DOE. "It is a credit to the Department's strategic planning for consolidating radioactive waste treatment at this site."

Facilities at AMWTP and the Central Characterization Project, an independent transuranic radioactive waste characterization operation located at AMWTP and other sites in the DOE Complex, teamed up to characterize and validate the waste from Nevada.

Bringing offsite waste into Idaho is governed by terms in the Idaho Settlement Agreement, a legally binding agreement between DOE, and the state of Idaho. Per the Settlement Agreement, mixed waste from sites outside of Idaho can be brought into the state, provided it is treated within six months of arriving in Idaho and must be shipped out of the state within six months following treatment. Bringing the Nevada waste to Idaho was also reviewed under the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.

"The Nevada waste was processed in addition to our primary responsibility of meeting all commitments to the state of Idaho to ship stored transuranic waste," Mousseau said. "We have performed this primary mission well and we're now two and a half years ahead of the Settlement Agreement schedule for safely and compliantly shipping waste out of the state."

Personnel at DOE Headquarters, the Carlsbad Field Office that oversees WIPP and CCP, and the Idaho Operations site collaborated to create a plan that would meet the stringent regulatory processes that govern the disposal of the nation's transuranic waste. "This shipment is the fruition of a planning process to safely and economically treat this waste and ensure it meets the waste acceptance criteria of our nation's only transuranic waste repository at WIPP," Provencher said.

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