



# **SNAKE RIVER ALLIANCE**

**IDAHO'S NUCLEAR WATCHDOG**

## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **DOE SUSPENDS INL WASTE SHIPMENTS TO NEW MEXICO; WASTE NOT CHARACTERIZED PROPERLY**

On Sunday, the Department of Energy (DOE) suspended certain waste shipments from the Idaho National Laboratory (INL) to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico. The suspension was because liquids were discovered in a drum during a new waste confirmation process that went into effect ten days ago. This new process is part of an agreement reached between the DOE and community groups to allow remote handled waste to be disposed of at WIPP. Community groups pushed DOE to conduct the confirmation before a shipment left INL, rather than doing the confirmation after it arrived at WIPP. More than 100 drums from the same waste stream as the problem drum have already been shipped to WIPP, raising the possibility of more drums containing liquids, but this has not been confirmed. INL previously stated that the waste stream in question has approximately 26,000 drums.

“The good news is the new requirement supported by community groups to confirm before shipping worked,” said Don Hancock, Nuclear Waste Safety Program Director for the Southwest Research and Information Center in New Mexico. “The bad news is there have been several other shipments from the same waste stream that might also contain liquids, which are already at WIPP. We’ve asked the New Mexico Environment Department to ask DOE what it will do to ensure that those drums at WIPP did not contain any liquids or other prohibited items.”

The INL has shipped about 17 shipments or more a week since April as part of the 1995 deal to ship all transuranic waste from INL to WIPP. While INL is currently ahead of schedule, it is unclear how the latest problem could affect efforts to meet future shipment goals. If there are other waste streams ready to ship, INL can continue moving waste from Idaho to WIPP. Otherwise the shipment program could come to a standstill until the issue is resolved.

Jeremy Maxand, Snake River Alliance executive director said, “Obviously we’re relieved that a particularly dangerous waste container didn’t get shipped. But we’re concerned that the problem drum went all the way through the inspection process at INL without raising any red flags. That the drum wasn’t stopped until it was halfway out the door is a red flag for us.”

Liquids are prohibited from being disposed of at WIPP because they are so dangerous to ship and so dangerous to dispose of. The primary danger is from leaks, but the potential for solvents or explosives is also significant. Liquids have always been prohibited from shipment to WIPP.

*The Snake River Alliance is an Idaho-based grassroots group working through research, education, and community advocacy for peace and justice, the end to nuclear weapons, responsible solutions to nuclear waste and contamination, and sustainable alternatives to nuclear power.*

*Southwest Research and Information Center is a multi-cultural organization working to promote the health of people and communities, protect natural resources, ensure citizen participation, and secure environmental and social justice now and for future generations.*