

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

Response to Inquiry
June 19, 2012
Drum damaged during underground emplacement

At approximately 1 p.m. on June 19, 2012, as waste handling crews were offloading and stacking waste drums in Room 5, Panel 6, for disposal, at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), the forklift operator struck an emplaced container, creating an approximate three inch puncture in the emplaced waste drum.

As required by procedure, all equipment was placed in a safe condition and waste crews immediately left the immediate area to report the incident and assess the situation. Ventilation was also switched from "normal" to "filtration" mode as a precaution to ensure no contaminants left the WIPP underground.

Radiological monitoring for personnel in the immediate work area did not reveal contamination on any of the workers involved. Radiological air monitoring equipment for the affected work area, designed to detect air borne contamination, did not alarm or indicate any detection of contamination.

The 100-gallon waste drum was from Idaho National Laboratory and consisted of compacted transuranic (TRU) waste debris. There were tubular spacers inside the drum, separating the compacted TRU waste from the drum wall.

Operations and radiological control personnel developed a work plan and within hours, had taken surveys (smears) of the drum and conducted radiological surveys of the area and equipment for contamination. No contamination was found and the drum puncture was sealed. As a precautionary measure, workers wore protective clothing while performing surveys.

As a courtesy, the New Mexico Environment Department and Environmental Protection Agency were notified of the event. Waste handling activities resumed on June 19, 2012.