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OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
AGRICULTURE, NATURAL DEVELOPMENT,
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DEFENSE

For Files *322*

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

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SUZANNE EISOLD
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Environment

September 13, 2001

Governor Gary E. Johnson
State Capitol Building
Santa Fe, NM 87503

Dear *Gary* Governor Johnson:



The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has submitted to your New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) a Class II modification to the WIPP's RCRA permit. From the national perspective this permit request is vitally important for the purposes of protecting workers handling the TRU waste and insuring the swift clean up and safe disposal of this waste.

Between July and December 2000 the DOE submitted three Class I permit modifications which at the suggestion of the NMED have now been combined into one Class II modification request. This request may allow the generator/storage sites the option to composite headspace samples, authorize two additional methods for obtaining headspace gas samples and establishes safety conditions that will apply to drums selected for visual examination.

On August 28, 2001 DOE requested Temporary Authorization which demonstrated the health and safety benefits from the revised sample method and the criteria for selecting containers for visual examination. In addition the Temporary Authorization documents that are granting the request will not compromise the ability for WIPP to protect human health or the environment and at the same time remain in compliance with the permit and the regulators.

As someone intimately involved with the WIPP, I empathize with the challenges you and the NMED face in making decisions regarding this facility. I strongly believe that it is vitally important to firmly protect the environment in New Mexico and its citizens. At the same time nothing done in New Mexico is done in a vacuum and the decisions made regarding WIPP have important health and safety impacts on workers and citizens across the nation.



The proposed Class II modifications and the Temporary Authorization request are important for health and safety reasons. I know that your department will give these requests careful consideration.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Joe Skeen', written in a cursive style.

JOE SKEEN

Member of Congress

JS:jh

cc: Peter Maggiore, Secretary of Environment