

Oversight chair questions safety at nuke dump

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The head of a federal nuclear safety oversight board calls the recent truck fire and radiation release from the government's troubled nuclear waste dump in southeastern New Mexico "near misses." And he says operations and safety procedures were not performed with the rigor necessary for a defense nuclear facility.

In a letter to New Mexico's two senators, Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board Chairman Peter Winokur says workers were unprepared for emergency response to a truck fire Feb. 5 at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant and a radiation release 9 days later that contaminated 17 workers.

Winokur says the board has had staff at the facility since the truck fire. The panel is an independent federal agency charged with overseeing public health and safety issues at Department of Energy defense-related nuclear facilities.

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