

New Mexico finds no 'red flags' in nuclear dump inspection

December 14 2016, by Susan Montoya Bryan

New Mexico inspectors did not uncover any red flags in their recent review of the federal government's underground nuclear waste repository as the facility prepares to reopen after a radiation leak, regulators said Wednesday.

The state Environment Department's team of inspectors focused on issues dating back to a 2014 fire involving one of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant's mining trucks and the separate leak that contaminated much of the underground disposal area, forcing the dump's indefinite closure.

Department Secretary Butch Tongate described the review as thorough, saying the state is responsible for ensuring the U.S. Energy Department and the contractor that manages the repository have addressed numerous violations stemming from the incidents and that corrective actions were taken.

"We've waited for nearly three years. We don't want to get anxious and jump too far without taking a real close look at it," he said. "We're being cautious."

Once the inspectors finish compiling their observations, the state will formally notify the Energy Department and the contractor of any shortcomings to address before operations can resume.

Tongate did not offer any specifics about what inspectors noted during last week's visit, only that they didn't find any major issues or red flags

and that the repository appeared to be on the verge of reopening.

The [federal government](#) has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on recovery work in the wake of the radiation release and shipments of waste at national laboratories and other defense sites around the country have been piling up during the closure.

Federal officials have conducted their own assessment of the facility's readiness and details of their findings are expected to be discussed during a town hall meeting Thursday.

Officials have identified 21 issues to resolve before operations can start at the southern New Mexico facility. They say an additional 15 issues can be addressed as waste disposal work resumes.

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