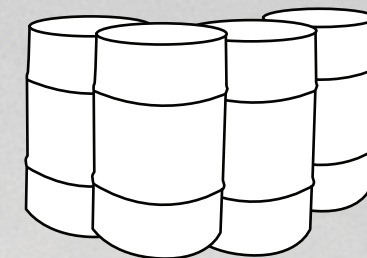


HOLDING THE FUTURE



PERMIAN SALT AND WIPP

This piece of salt is 250 million years old. It came from a 3000 foot thick salt bed 2,150 feet below the surface of the earth. The salt bed is now the site of WIPP (Waste Isolation Pilot Plant) 26 miles east of Carlsbad, NM in the Permian Basin. WIPP is the nation's first and only deep geologic repository for the storage of TRU nuclear waste (TRU = transuranic, meaning beyond uranium on the Periodic Table of Elements). It began operations on March 26, 1999 and is scheduled to be filled to capacity by 2033. The waste is placed in rooms carved from a salt formation deposited by the evaporation of an ancient Permian ocean. Salt beds heal their own fractures because of their plastic quality. According to WIPP scientists, geologists and miners, salt formations will slowly move to fill in mined areas and seal radioactive waste in place. The site will be "actively" monitored for 100 years and then "passively" for 10,000. The waste will remain radioactive for approximately 250,000 years. Since 1991, the Department of Energy has been working with a team of linguists, scientists, science fiction writers, anthropologists and futurists to come up with a system to deter humans from the site for 10,000 years.

wipp.energy.gov

