

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 6, 2026

Assistant Secretary Tim Walsh
Office of Environmental Management
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Assistant Secretary Walsh:

We write to express our growing concern for the safety of workers at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) following the August 19, 2026, incident involving the Air Intake Shaft (AIS) hoist, in which a five-person emergency lift plunged to the bottom of the shaft after its cable snapped during testing. This incident is deeply alarming, and it comes against a backdrop of ongoing, documented concerns about the condition of WIPP's aging hoist infrastructure. The safety of WIPP's workers must come first. These individuals deserve nothing less than full confidence in the systems and procedures on which their lives depend.

We urge the Department to ensure a thorough, transparent investigation of the August 19 incident and to solicit the full engagement of the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) as an independent party in that review. Given the nature of the event and the facility's history of hoist-related failures, an independent assessment of these incidents is essential to credibility—both for workers and for the communities that depend on WIPP's continued safe operation.

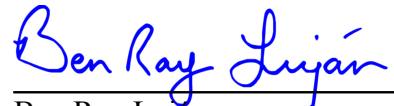
This incident also highlights what we understand to be a pattern of unproductive and unsustainable tensions between some WIPP workers and Salado Isolation Mining Contractors, the facility's prime contractor. These dynamics, if unaddressed, present their own risk to the safe and stable operation of the facility. A workforce that does not trust the contractor responsible for their safety is a major operational risk.

We want to be clear: the Department of Energy bears ultimate responsibility for the safe, stable, and long-term operation of WIPP. That responsibility is not delegable to a contractor. We therefore ask that DOE be proactively engaged as an active participant in the investigation and resolution of this incident. Workers must be kept fully informed of findings and corrective actions, and their safety concerns must be meaningfully addressed, not managed.

Sincerely,



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee on
Energy and Natural Resources



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Gabe Vasquez
Member of Congress