

Highlights of [GAO-25-107333](#), a report to congressional committees.

Why This Matters

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) is the nation's only geologic repository for disposing of certain nuclear waste from defense-related activities, such as contaminated soil. The Department of Energy (DOE) expects the site to operate until the 2080s. However, much of the infrastructure is in degraded condition, increasing risks of failure and impacting WIPP's waste disposal mission.

GAO Key Takeaways

DOE commissioned a survey in 2016 that identified over \$37 million in deferred maintenance costs for WIPP's site infrastructure—including buildings, electrical substations, hoists, and other assets. Some infrastructure has been refurbished or replaced since then. However, our analysis shows 29 of 56 assets that are essential to the mission were in substandard or inadequate condition in 2023 (the most recent data at the time of our review).

WIPP's contractor handles daily maintenance, refurbishment, and replacement of infrastructure. The contractor also maintains data about the condition and deficiencies of site infrastructure. DOE uses the data to make decisions about assets. DOE has repeatedly identified issues with the data, including unreliable values, but has not ensured that the contractor develops timelines to correct those issues.

DOE evaluates the contractor's performance annually and approves long-term plans for infrastructure management. However, DOE has not consistently incentivized the contractor to develop and execute long-term plans. Accurate data and clear long-term management plans would help DOE plan, prioritize, and fund critical maintenance for WIPP's infrastructure and reduce costly emergency refurbishment of assets critical to nuclear waste disposal.

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in Carlsbad, New Mexico



Source: Department of Energy. | GAO-25-107333

How GAO Did This Study

We visited WIPP in 2024. We analyzed data and documents and interviewed officials from DOE and from the contractor. We compared this information against DOE's requirements for data maintenance and reporting and for contractor oversight.

What GAO Recommends

We made three recommendations to DOE to improve data collection and ensure that the site contractor is meeting long-term site infrastructure planning requirements. DOE concurred with our recommendations.

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