

New Public Information Resources on Salt Caverns

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Abstract

For the past decade, interest has been growing in using underground salt caverns for disposing of wastes. The Railroad Commission of Texas has permitted a few caverns for disposal of nonhazardous oil field waste (NOW) and one cavern for disposal of naturally occurring radioactive materials (NORM) from oil field activities. Several salt caverns in Canada have also been permitted for disposal of NOW. In addition, oil and gas agencies in Louisiana and New Mexico are developing cavern disposal regulations. The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has funded several studies to evaluate the technical feasibility, legality, economic viability, and risk of disposing of NOW and NORM in caverns. The results of these studies have been disseminated to the scientific and regulatory communities. However, as use of caverns for waste disposal increases, more government and industry representatives and members of the public will become aware of this practice and will need adequate information about how disposal caverns operate and the risks they pose. In anticipation of this need, DOE has funded Argonne National Laboratory to develop a salt cavern public outreach program. Key components of this program are an informational brochure designed for nontechnical persons and a website that provides greater detail on cavern operations and allows downloadable access to the reports on the topic funded by DOE. This paper provides an overview of the public outreach program.

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