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# DOENews

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## *For Immediate Release* **Second Panel of Disposal Rooms Completed in WIPP Underground**

**CARLSBAD, N.M., October 13, 2000** – The U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Carlsbad Field Office today announced the completion of the second of eight planned underground disposal panels at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP).

Crews working in two shifts completed mining Panel 2 weeks ahead of schedule and under budget. Panel 2 is the second disposal panel excavated 2,150 feet below the desert floor for permanent disposal of defense-generated transuranic radioactive waste.

DOE Waste Disposal Operations Team Leader Jack Gilbert praised operations crews. "When asked, they always step up to the plate, either by doing the job ahead of schedule, under budget, or both," Gilbert said.

In accordance with WIPP's design, Panel 2 is identical in layout to Panel 1. Mining of Panel 1 was a 3-year project completed in 1988. After an 11-year hiatus, mining restarted at WIPP in October 1999. To meet waste disposal schedules, the Westinghouse Waste Isolation Division added a second shift of workers and used commercial mining techniques to complete the panel in just under 11 months.

"As with everything we do at WIPP, safety was our top priority during this operation," said Westinghouse Underground Operations Manager Leroy Bostick. "There were no significant safety issues reported during the mining activities, and three Mine Safety and Health Administration inspections were conducted without findings."

Westinghouse is the management and operating contractor for DOE at WIPP.

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Underground waste disposal panels are arranged in parallel sets of seven rooms each. Each set of seven rooms is called a panel. Each disposal room is 300 feet long, 33 feet wide and 13 feet high. A disposal room will hold the equivalent of 12,000 standard 55-gallon drums of waste.

WIPP, a cornerstone of the DOE's cleanup effort, is designed to permanently dispose of defense-generated transuranic radioactive waste left from the research and production of nuclear weapons.

Located in Southeast New Mexico, 26 miles east of Carlsbad, project facilities include disposal rooms excavated in an ancient, stable salt formation 2,150 feet (almost one-half mile) underground. Waste disposal operations began at WIPP March 26, 1999.

Transuranic waste consists of clothing, tools, rags, debris, residues, and other disposable items contaminated with radioactive elements, mostly plutonium.

For more information about WIPP, call 1-800-336-9477, or visit the WIPP Web site at <http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>.