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For Immediate Release

DOE Releasing \$20 Million to State of New Mexico

CARLSBAD, N.M., August 21, 2000 – The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) today announced that it is releasing \$20 million in impact assistance funding to the state of New Mexico.

The funds were originally earmarked for state highway improvements along routes leading to DOE's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). DOE placed the \$20 million in a trust fund after the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) included a provision for closure and post-closure activities at WIPP in the Hazardous Waste Facility Permit. The funding was released after NMED removed the financial assurance provisions from the permit on August 9, 2000.

To date, DOE has provided over \$80 million in impact assistance funding to New Mexico under provisions of the WIPP Land Withdrawal Act of 1992.

DOE originally challenged the financial assurance provisions, along with four other requirements of the permit, in federal district court and the New Mexico State Court of Appeals in November 1999. DOE believed those provisions in the hazardous waste permit placed unnecessary and unlawful requirements on the department that would lead to workers being unnecessarily exposed to radiation, additional delays and expenditures for DOE sites cleaning up the legacy of the Cold War and further strain on existing resources.

Notices to dismiss the lawsuits were filed in the federal and state courts on August 18 and 21, 2000 after NMED approved DOE's proposed modifications to the WIPP hazardous waste permit that strengthen protections for workers and ensure safe and efficient operations.

The Hazardous Waste Facility Permit governs the characterization and subsequent disposal of “mixed” transuranic waste that includes both radioactive waste and regulated hazardous 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 southeastern 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 Home Page at www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us.