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For Immediate Release

WIPP Selected Charter Member of National Environmental Performance Track Program

CARLSBAD, N.M., December 14, 2000 – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has selected the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) as a charter member of the National Environmental Performance Track Program.

EPA designed the performance track program to recognize and encourage facilities that go beyond compliance with regulatory requirements. These top performers attain levels of environmental performance that benefit people, communities and the environment.

The program is available to facilities of all types, sizes and complexity, public or private, manufacturing or service oriented. Participation in the performance track program enables facilities to implement flexible and potentially more efficient approaches to environmental protection.

Participating facilities also receive several incentives in return for their environmental commitment, including the use of the performance track program logo, acknowledgment on EPA's Internet Web site and in program communications, peer exchange opportunities, and recognition in EPA publications and special events.

"This recognition is a great honor and provides yet another example of WIPP's commitment to environmental excellence," said Dr. Inés Triay, Manager of DOE's Carlsbad Field Office.

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WIPP representatives received the award during a Dec. 13 ceremony in Washington, D.C.

WIPP, a cornerstone of 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 Web site at <http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>.