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For Immediate Release

State of Washington Officials Join Department of Energy To Dedicate WIPP Disposal Room

CARLSBAD, N.M., June 2, 2000 – U.S. Congressman Doc Hastings of Washington state joined U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) officials today in dedicating the “Washington Room” at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP).

Disposal Room 2 of Panel 1 in the WIPP underground will be filled with transuranic radioactive waste from the Hanford Site near Richland, Wash., as well as other DOE facilities.

“The state of Washington is pleased that WIPP is open and will soon accept transuranic waste from Hanford,” said Congressman Hastings. “This event recognizes the years of cooperation and dedication among all parties in making WIPP a reality. It also shows continuing progress on the cleanup of the Hanford Site.”

Hanford will send approximately 20,000 cubic meters of contact handled waste to WIPP. DOE will use the Transuranic Package Transporter Model 2, or TRUPACT-II, to safely transport about 2,300 shipments containing an estimated 96,500 55-gallon drums of radioactive waste out of Washington. The shipments are expected to begin mid-June 2000 and continue through the year 2035.

“The state of Washington is an important player in our effort to solve a national problem,” said Dr. Inés Triay, manager of DOE’s Carlsbad Area Office. “Cooperative relationships such as the one we celebrate today are key to the continued success of our nuclear waste cleanup efforts.”

Others participating in today's room dedication included Keith Klein, manager of the DOE-Richland Operations Office; Washington State Representatives Shirley Hankins and Jerome Delvin; Lt. Steve Kalmbach, Washington State Patrol; Larry Taylor, Benton County Sheriff, state of Washington; John Heaton, New Mexico State Representative; and Carlsbad Mayor Gary Perkowski.

Prior to accepting his current position at Hanford, Klein was the acting Carlsbad Area Office manager when WIPP received its first waste shipment on March 26, 1999.

The Washington Room is the fourth waste disposal room to be dedicated to a state involved in the DOE's cleanup effort. DOE previously dedicated the Colorado Room, the Idaho Room and the New Mexico Room. The idea came about in 1996, when several members of Idaho's congressional delegation and high-ranking Idaho state officials toured WIPP to see where the DOE planned to dispose of waste from the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory (INEEL).

The Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site in Colorado, INEEL, and Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico are the first three waste generator sites to ship waste to the WIPP since it began disposal operations on March 26, 1999.

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 southeast 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 our Web site at <http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>.