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For Immediate Release

WIPP Mine Rescue Team Wins Regional Competition

CARLSBAD, N.M., May 31, 2001 – The Blue Mine Rescue Team from the U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) placed first in the recent Southern Regional Mine Rescue Competition, continuing a winning streak in regional contests.

The WIPP Blue Team led throughout the competition, May 17-19 in New Iberia, Louisiana. Faced with solving problems in the field, deciphering a map, and taking a written exam, the Blue Team excelled in each category.

This was the WIPP Blue Team’s third victory in the past eight months. The team also placed first in the Southeastern Missouri Regional Mine Rescue Competition in October and the Southwestern Regional Mine Rescue Competition in April.

“The Blue Team unquestionably sets the standard for excellence in mine rescue,” said Candice Jierree, Environment, Safety and Health Manager with Westinghouse TRU Solutions LLC. “Each member of the team has a specialty, but they are an extremely close-knit and generous group. They offer assistance not only to each other, but also to miners from other organizations.”

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

The Blue Team members are Buddy Webb, coordinator and trainer; Gary Kessler, captain; Lance Turnbow, co-captain; Joel Howard, gasman; Dave Sjomeling, mapman; Ben “Ty” Zimmerly, alternate; Mitch Carter, first aid; Joe Baca, benchman; and Beverly Watson, fresh air base attendant.

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In addition to the team win, WIPP Blue Team member Ben “Ty” Zimmerly was the only contestant in the competition to correctly answer all questions on the written exam.

Joe Baca, the team’s benchman, won first place in his individual category. The benchman is responsible for maintaining the team’s breathing apparatuses. The competition involves detecting and repairing defects in the equipment. Baca is recognized as one of the best benchmen in the mining industry, having won the category in competitions 20 times since 1993, including the national title in 1998.

WIPP instituted its mine rescue team program in the early 1980s. Each team consists of eight members – a captain, co-captain, gasman, mapman, first aid attendant, alternate, benchman, and fresh air base attendant.

WIPP, a cornerstone of DOE’s cleanup effort, is the nation’s first repository for the permanent disposal of defense-generated transuranic radioactive waste left from research and production of nuclear weapons.

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

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