

U.S. Department of Energy
Carlsbad Field Office
Waste Isolation Pilot Plant
P.O. Box 3090
Carlsbad, New Mexico 88221

DOENews

Media Contacts

Dennis Hurtt
U.S. DOE Carlsbad Area Office
(505) 234-7327

Bill Keeley
Westinghouse TRU Solutions LLC
(505) 234-7594
<http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>

For Immediate Release

DOE, Westinghouse to Partner with NMJC To Train Radiological and Waste Handling Technicians

Hobbs, NM, December 5, 2001 -- Representatives of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) yesterday presented a check for \$70,000 to New Mexico Junior College (NMJC) to initiate a new program to train and certify radiological and waste handling technicians.

Dr. Steve McCleery, President of NMJC, accepted the check from Dr. Chuan-Fu Wu, Senior Technical Advisor for the U.S. Department of Energy's Carlsbad Field Office, and Terry Frye, Manager of Human Resources for Westinghouse TRU Solutions LLC.

"WIPP's need for radiological control and waste handling technicians is increasing dramatically, proportional to increasing numbers of shipments of transuranic radioactive waste to the facility," said Dr. Wu. "This new program is designed to create a pool of qualified technicians in Southeast New Mexico from which WIPP and other businesses in the region can draw when job openings occur.

"This joint effort between WIPP and NMJC results from numerous meetings and discussions between the organizations, including a recent tour of the NMJC campus by Dr. Inés Triay, Carlsbad Field Office Manager," said Dr. Wu. "Realizing the significant benefits that the program could bring to Southeast New Mexico and to WIPP, Dr. Triay has been very supportive of this effort."

NMJC is recruiting for a program director to coordinate the effort, and classes are expected to begin in early 2002. Initial certification training will span approximately eight weeks. The training will emphasize instruction in mathematics, physics and chemistry, all of which are vital subjects for employees working with radioactive wastes.

-More-

Initially, until the NMJC curricula are fully in place, qualified WIPP technical staff will serve as adjunct professors, supporting professional staff from the college.

Frye said much of the training also is applicable to other job classifications at WIPP, setting up a pathway for future job assignments and promotions.

Simultaneously, NMJC is developing curricula leading to associates degrees in radiation control and waste handling, and possibly hazardous waste management. The associates program is expected to be in place next fall, with a target of having 15 students enrolled.

Dr. McCleery said representatives of NMJC have discussed the plans with other business interests in Southeastern New Mexico and Southwest Texas who have similar needs for technicians trained in radiation control, waste handling, and hazardous waste management.

WIPP, a cornerstone of the DOE's cleanup effort, is the nation's first repository for the permanent disposal 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.ws>.