

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 Field Office
(505) 234-7327

Dan Balduini
Westinghouse TRU Solutions LLC
(505) 234-7515
<http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>

For Immediate Release

WIPP Reaches Milestone — First Disposal Room Filled

CARLSBAD, N.M., September 4, 2001 – The U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) Carlsbad Field Office today announced that Room 7 of Panel 1 at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), the first underground room used for disposal operations, has been filled to capacity with transuranic waste.

The milestone was reached at about 3:30 p.m. on August 24, as Waste Handling personnel emplaced a shipment of waste from the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory. On August 25, Underground Operations personnel completed installation of a chain link mesh barrier and cloth drape across the entrance to the room to officially declare the area “closed.” The first shipment of waste, which came to WIPP from Los Alamos National Laboratory, was placed in Room 7 on March 26, 1999.

Room 7 of Panel 1 now holds 10,089 drums of transuranic waste. The waste represents 352 shipments from five DOE sites – 23 from Los Alamos National Laboratory, 195 from the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site, 121 from the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory, nine from the Hanford Site and four from the Savannah River Site.

“It is exciting to see the progress we are making,” said Dr. Inés Triay, Manager of the Carlsbad Field Office. “We are working hard to clean up DOE sites across the country in a timely and cost-effective manner. Seeing a disposal room filled to capacity helps us visualize our goal.”

- More -

- 2 -

WIPP will ultimately be the final resting place for the equivalent of about 648,000 55-gallon drums of radioactive transuranic waste. Disposal operations are expected to continue through 2034 as WIPP reaches its authorized capacity of 6.2 million cubic feet.

Mined at a depth of 2,150 feet below the Earth's surface, WIPP's underground waste disposal panels are arranged in parallel sets of seven rooms each. Each set of seven rooms is called a panel. Each disposal room is 300 feet long, 33 feet wide and 13 feet high. Two disposal panels have been mined to date.

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 the research and production of nuclear weapons.

Located in Southeast 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>.

-30-

035DR0901