

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

## **WIPP Mine Rescue Team Sweeps Southeast Missouri Competition**

**CARLSBAD, N.M., October 15, 2001** – The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) Blue Mine Rescue Team captured first place in all three categories at the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Southeast Missouri Mine Rescue Competition held October 3-5 at the University of Missouri at Rolla.

The WIPP Blue Team outscored mining industry teams from Louisiana, New Mexico, Mississippi and Missouri in the competition, which took place in a mine maintained by the University of Missouri at Rolla.

Individually, WIPP's Joe Baca won the bench competition, with teammate Richard West placing third. The benchman competition tests the skills required to maintain and repair breathing equipment used by team members to access areas where air is not breathable.

Additionally, the WIPP Blue Team captured top honors in the field and first aid categories of the event. Team members are Gary Kessler (Captain), Lance Turnbow (Rear Captain), Joel Howard (Gas Person), David Sjomeling (Map Person), Mike Proctor (First Aid), Ben "Tye" Zimmerly (Alternate), David Penick (Fresh Air), Joe Baca (Benchman), Richard West (Benchman) and Buddy Webb (Trainer).

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Mine rescue personnel are trained in mine gases, ventilation, first aid, mine recovery and fire fighting. In competition, they are rated on how well they follow basic Mine Safety and Health Administration rules and regulations in carrying out a rescue under adverse, disaster-like conditions. In a real emergency, the lives of coworkers depend on the teams' skills.

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.carlsbad.nm.us>.