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For Immediate Release

Tri-State Motor Transit to Resume Shipping Transuranic Waste to WIPP

CARLSBAD, N.M., January 19, 2001 – Tri-State Motor Transit will resume shipping waste to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) January 22, transporting transuranic waste from the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory (INEEL) to WIPP.

This will be the first shipment by Tri-State Motor Transit (TSMT) to WIPP since the November 21 incident in which drivers hauling waste from INEEL to WIPP failed to make the turn off from I-25 onto U.S. 285, deviating from the designated transportation route by 27 miles.

The New Mexico State Police noticed the route deviation and contacted the TRANSCOM Control Center (TCC) in Albuquerque to verify that the shipment was off course. The TCC confirmed the route deviation using their tracking system and notified the drivers, via cell phone, that they were off course, and the drivers subsequently turned around. There was no failure of the tracking system.

TSMT conducted an internal investigation into the cause of the incident and provided its findings to the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO). TSMT identified a series of corrective actions, including providing additional training and exercises for its drivers to ensure that they are completely familiar with WIPP shipment routes and notification procedures.

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“While this was an isolated incident,” said Dr. Inés Triay, CBFO Manager, “any deviation from the established route is a matter of importance to the Department of Energy. The CBFO reviewed all findings and actions to determine the causes of the incident have been corrected. We expect DOE transportation carriers to adhere to the highest standards to ensure that we safely ship waste to WIPP.”

TRANSCOM is the satellite-based system used by DOE to track shipments of transuranic waste en route to WIPP. Additional administrative controls have been established to ensure more real-time observation of unanticipated transportation delays or route deviations.

The DOE National Transportation Program, in conjunction with Los Alamos National Laboratory, developed software that works with the TRANSCOM monitoring program to provide an audible alarm in the event of an unanticipated delay or route deviation. This software is currently installed on two independent TRANSCOM monitors in the Central Monitoring Room at WIPP. Tri-State Motor Transit is one of the largest transporters of hazardous materials in the U.S. and is one of two transportation carriers for WIPP shipments. CAST of Henderson, Colorado, has been a transportation contractor for WIPP since 1995. CAST met all WIPP shipping commitments while the route deviation incident was investigated.

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 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>.