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For Immediate Release

WIPP Workers Reach Two Million Man-Hours Without a Lost-Time Accident

CARLSBAD, N.M., February 22, 2001 – Workers at the U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) reached a safety milestone Feb. 19 by working two million man-hours without a lost-time accident.

According to the National Safety Council, facilities with the same industry code as WIPP lose an average of 20.6 workdays (or 164.8 man-hours) a year to accidents.

“Safety is at the core of all WIPP operations,” said Dr. Inés Triay, Manager of DOE’s Carlsbad Field Office. “We are particularly pleased that WIPP workers reached the two million mark during the time in which they mined a new panel and increased shift work.”

“To make safety a number one priority means more than creating a safe workplace. The staff is also constantly striving to behave in a safe manner. It’s part of our culture at WIPP,” said Hank Herrera, President and General Manager of Westinghouse TRU Solutions LLC (WTS), the management and operating contractor for DOE at WIPP. “I am very proud of the workforce and the achievement of this significant safety milestone.”

The Safety Management System at WIPP is an integral part of the conduct of operations. Safety is included in the planning and work stages of all projects. There is also a feedback mechanism for continuous improvement that includes a “lessons learned” component.

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“WIPP provides some of the best training in the world to its employees. They know the hazards to which they are exposed and are trained to identify the hazards and to protect themselves,” said Candice Jierree, Environment, Safety and Health Manager, WTS. “Our next goal is three million hours, and we hope to continue on from there.”

The safe hours include those worked by employees of DOE, WTS, and other contractors associated with WIPP.

The last time WIPP reached two million man-hours with no lost-time was December 1993. The WIPP site reached the three million mark in March 1992.

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 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>.

