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For Immediate Release

WIPP Marks Five Years of Safe Operation

CARLSBAD, N.M., April 1, 2004 – The U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) last week marked five years of safe operations, during which the site received more than 2,400 shipments of transuranic waste generated by defense activities. WIPP received its first shipment of transuranic waste on March 26, 1999.

"Every day for five years," said R. Paul Detwiler, acting manager of the DOE Carlsbad Field Office, "WIPP employees have demonstrated to the nation and the world that radioactive wastes can be transported and disposed of in a manner that is safe and that protects people and the environment. Their contribution to the DOE's cleanup of the Cold War's legacy is outstanding. Thanks to their dedication to safety and quality performance, WIPP is an international model for the responsible disposal of radioactive waste. There are now more than 671,000 cubic feet of radioactive wastes in the repository that prior to March 1999 were stored on the surface at facilities in New Mexico, Nevada, Washington, South Carolina, Idaho, Colorado and Illinois."

WIPP's progress has been remarkable by any standard. In 1999, WIPP received 1-2 waste shipments during a week; now, more than 20 shipments arrive each week. These shipments traveled more than 2.4 million miles without a significant transportation incident. Trucks carrying empty shipping containers back to sites so that they could be filled again traveled an additional 2.4 million miles safely. DOE met its commitment to Idaho to remove 109,475 cubic feet of TRU waste from the state by December 2002. More than 356,000 cubic feet of waste have been

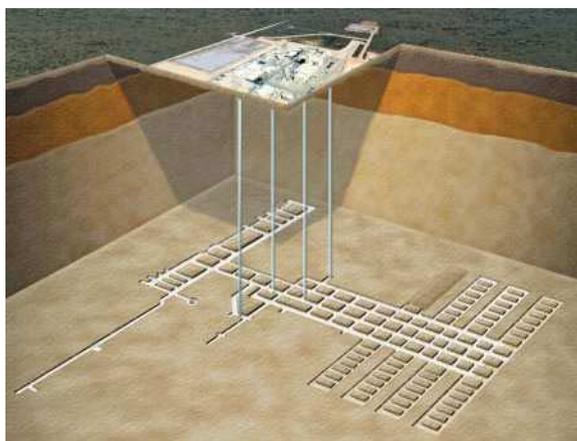
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removed from the Rocky Flats site in Colorado, allowing the Department to continue its progress toward closing the site by 2006.

In March 2003, DOE completed waste emplacement in the first of WIPP's eight panels – each of which will consist of seven football-field-sized disposal rooms. Panel 1 was closed in July 2003, and waste disposal is now underway in Panel 2. The mining of Panel 3 is almost complete.

Just last week, DOE submitted its 9,000-page compliance recertification application for WIPP to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The application contains new information and analyses that demonstrate WIPP's continuing compliance with EPA's stringent requirements for the disposal of transuranic waste. Congress required DOE to submit these applications on the fifth anniversary of WIPP's opening and every five years thereafter.

In addition, EPA last week approved DOE's plans for characterizing remote-handled waste. DOE must now obtain approval from the New Mexico Environment Department to dispose of "mixed" remote-handled waste – waste that contains both radioactive constituents and hazardous constituents such as solvents and toxic metals. Although remote-handled waste will constitute only four percent of the total volume of waste sent to WIPP, its safe disposal is vital to DOE's cleanup mission.



WIPP is the nation's solution for cleaning up defense-generated transuranic waste left from the research and production of nuclear weapons. Located 26 miles east of Carlsbad, New Mexico, WIPP opened March 26, 1999, and has safely received and disposed of over 2,400 waste shipments. WIPP's facilities include disposal rooms excavated in an ancient stable salt formation nearly one-half mile underground.