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For Immediate Release

NMED Approves Safer Testing Requirements for LANL Sealed Source Wastes

CARLSBAD, N.M., April 6, 2004 – Some sealed source wastes now stored at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) will no longer require lengthy storage and intrusive characterization techniques prior to disposal at the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP).

On March 15, the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) approved a DOE request to eliminate headspace gas sampling and analysis for wastes consisting of discarded sealed sources. Sealed sources contain materials such as plutonium²³⁹ encased in special, double-sealed capsules. These sources are generally designed to produce gamma rays and neutrons for a variety of purposes, such as instrument calibration, irradiation, heat sources, oil and gas well logging and research. The sources are sealed at the time of manufacture and are not opened prior to disposal.

Because the sealed sources contain quantities of radioactive material, the intrusive nature of the formerly required headspace gas sampling posed a hazard to workers collecting the samples. DOE demonstrated to NMED's satisfaction that the possibility of hazardous gases inside sealed sources is insignificant.

With the NMED approval, sealed sources that are no longer needed and meet WIPP disposal criteria can now be disposed of at WIPP intact. In an effort to strengthen

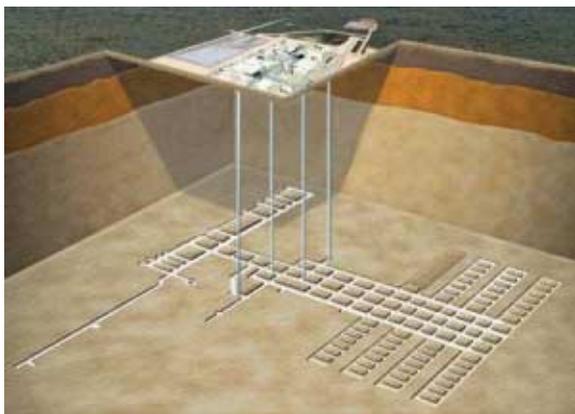
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homeland security, DOE is recovering and safely storing excess and unwanted sealed sources at LANL under the department's Off-Site Source Recovery Project. Sealed sources are currently being recovered from more than 100 sites around the country.

"This is a very positive step for the nation's security," said Lee Leonard, Los Alamos manager of the Off-Site Source Recovery Project. "DOE and LANL worked closely with NMED to gain its approval of this request. NMED recognized the importance of facilitating the recovery of these sources to national security on both the state and federal level."

Documentation that accompanies each sealed source describes the material inside, the date of manufacture, its use and other information. Due to the quality of this documentation and the secure packaging, NMED agreed that intrusive tests that increase the potential for worker exposure were unnecessary in characterizing the waste.

Sealed sources that qualify as transuranic waste will be packaged in containers for shipment to WIPP and disposed of like other types of transuranic waste.



WIPP is the nation's solution for cleaning up defense-generated transuranic waste located at DOE sites across the country. Five years in operation, WIPP has received over 2,400 waste shipments, safely disposing more than 18,000 cubic meters of transuranic waste in the repository located nearly one-half mile underground.