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DOE Waste Isolation Pilot Plant Receives EPA Recertification

CARLSBAD, N.M – The U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) Carlsbad Field Office today reached a significant milestone when its Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) was recertified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This decision indicates that after a thorough evaluation of the physical state and performance of the facility, the WIPP meets EPA regulatory requirements for facilities that dispose of transuranic waste. The waste facility recertification process occurs every five years and is directed by Congress in the WIPP Land Withdrawal Act (LWA).

“EPA’s recertification reinforces the important mission of WIPP to safely dispose of defense-generated transuranic waste from across the nation,” said James Rispoli, DOE’s Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management. “We appreciate EPA’s thorough review and concurrence that WIPP continues to meet all regulatory performance requirements. WIPP remains the cornerstone of DOE’s waste management program.”

This is the first recertification decision since the first certification was issued in May 1998. EPA recertification verifies the site’s continued compliance with federal disposal regulations outlined in 40 Code of Federal Regulations Part 191 and is based on various independent technical analyses, public comments, and a thorough review of facility information submitted by DOE. The Carlsbad office submitted its compliance recertification application to EPA on March 26, 2004, exactly five years after the first waste was received at WIPP. Through technical and scientific analyses detailed in the application, DOE demonstrated that the WIPP will continue to safely isolate transuranic waste from the human environment for at least 10,000 years.

“The recertification of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant falls three days after the seventh anniversary of disposal operations began,” said CBFO Manager Dave Moody. “EPA’s decision is further evidence of the great work that WIPP does and reinforces the fact that the WIPP program is sound and operates safely, efficiently and in a compliant manner.”

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, located 26 miles outside of Carlsbad, N.M., is a U.S. Department of Energy repository designed to isolate defense-related transuranic waste safely from the public and the environment. Waste temporarily stored at sites around the country is shipped to WIPP and permanently disposed in rooms mined out of an ancient salt formation 2,150 feet below the surface.

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