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100th WIPP Quarterly Meeting continues tradition of consultation and cooperation with state

CARLSBAD, N.M., October 10, 2007 – The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) reached a major milestone in its consultation and cooperation with the state of New Mexico and stakeholders. Today, WIPP marked the 100th gathering of project, state and other stakeholders, officially called the WIPP Quarterly Technical Review Meeting.

“The WIPP quarterly meetings are a long-standing part of WIPP history,” says Dr. David Moody, manager of the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO). “They helped establish a strong tradition of information sharing and cooperation with our state regulators, state oversight groups and interested stakeholders throughout the years.”

The quarterly meetings, which originally only included DOE and the state of New Mexico represented by the Environmental Evaluation Group, now serve as a way to share information about WIPP with a broader constituency, which includes key stakeholder groups, multiple state agencies and the public. The agenda for Wednesday’s meeting included program updates from the CBFO, the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), the New Mexico Radioactive Waste Consultation Task Force and the WIPP independent oversight contractor.

The location of the meeting is rotated among CBFO, the NMED Oversight Bureau, the NMED Hazardous Waste Bureau, and the New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department. The 100th WIPP quarterly meeting was held in Carlsbad, NM.

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The start of the WIPP quarterly meeting pre-dates most of the project's impressive accomplishments. The first WIPP quarterly meeting was held on May 1, 1981, before major construction at the WIPP site began and nearly 18 years prior to the first receipt of waste.

The meetings began based on a draft agreement between DOE and the state of New Mexico, which required consultation and cooperation on a regular, ongoing basis. Organizers established the quarterly timeframe through the Consultation and Cooperation Agreement, which was finalized in July 1981.

Participants in the first meeting included DOE, the Environmental Evaluation Group, Bechtel National, Westinghouse Electric Corp. and Sandia National Laboratories. Meeting topics were usually arranged to report and discuss progress toward key milestones spelled out in the Consultation and Cooperation Agreement. On that first day, the group's lengthy agenda included discussions related to site and design evaluations, WIPP permitting activities and land withdrawal proceedings by DOE.

Also addressed in the first meeting was the next phase of development, underground exploration and definitive design, and subsequent facility construction." Underground excavation at WIPP began the following year, in 1982.

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant is a U.S. Department of Energy facility designed to safely isolate defense-related transuranic waste from people 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. WIPP, which began waste disposal operations on March 26, 1999, is located 26 miles outside of Carlsbad, N.M.