



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF **ENERGY**

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For Immediate Release

DOE Issues Statement Concerning Debates Over Waste Disposal in Salt

CARLSBAD, N.M., July 24, 2009 – The U.S. Department of Energy and its Carlsbad Field Office recognize and respect the long history that led to the current regulations that govern operations at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). The WIPP is authorized to ship and dispose of transuranic (TRU) waste that was created by U.S. defense programs. TRU waste is a category of waste strictly defined by legislation and legal agreements.

The WIPP mission includes the safe disposal of two types of defense-related TRU waste, contact-handled (CH) and remote-handled (RH). Both consist of tools, rags, protective clothing, sludges, soil and other materials contaminated with radioactive elements that have atomic numbers greater than uranium.

An article in the August 2009 issue of *Scientific American* contained discussion about the use of salt formations for disposal of other radioactive waste forms, including spent fuel and high-level waste. Legislation and legally binding documents specifically prohibit these other waste forms from being disposed of at WIPP. Therefore, the debate about disposal in salt is different than the debate about disposal in WIPP.

The Secretary of Energy is assembling a Blue Ribbon Panel to evaluate options for disposal of high level waste and spent nuclear fuel. The positions expressed in the Scientific American article are not reflective of the Department of Energy's position.

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 in 1999, is located 26 miles outside of Carlsbad, N.M.

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