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For Immediate Release

Los Alamos National Laboratory Ships Remote-Handled Transuranic Waste to WIPP

CARLSBAD, N.M., June 3, 2009 – Cleanup of the nation’s defense-related transuranic (TRU) waste has reached an important milestone. Today, the first shipment of remote-handled (RH) TRU waste from Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) in New Mexico arrived safely at the U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in the southeast corner of the state.

“Shipping this waste to WIPP is important for our national cleanup mission, but this event is especially important for New Mexicans,” said DOE Carlsbad Field Office Manager Dave Moody. “It’s great to see progress being made right here in our own state.”

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

RH-TRU waste has a higher dose rate than CH-TRU waste at the surface of the disposal container, but it is shipped in a lead-lined cask, which keeps it below required U.S. Department of Transportation limits for all radioactive waste shipments. Only about four percent of the total volume of waste received at WIPP is expected to be RH-TRU waste.

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WIPP began disposing of RH-TRU waste in January 2007. LANL is the fifth site to ship RH-TRU waste to WIPP, following the Idaho National Laboratory in Idaho, Argonne National Laboratory in Ill., the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tenn. and the Savannah River Site in South Carolina.

LANL holds an important place in WIPP history, having been the first site to ship CH-TRU waste to WIPP in March 1999. To date, LANL has made more than 455 shipments of CH-TRU waste to WIPP, which is about 340 miles away.

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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