



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF **ENERGY**

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For Immediate Release

WIPP Marks a Decade of Safe Disposal

CARLSBAD, N.M., March 25, 2009 – The nation’s first and only deep geologic repository for the disposal of defense-related transuranic (TRU) radioactive waste has safely operated for more than 10 years. The U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) began disposal operations March 26, 1999 and today serves as an international model for radioactive waste management.

“What this project has accomplished is remarkable,” said DOE Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO) Manager Dave Moody. “We all have great reason to be proud. There’s no doubt in my mind that our project success results from great cooperation among people. We have a talented work force, tremendous support from our host communities and state, and a good working relationship with our regulators.”

Since opening, WIPP has received more than 7,200 shipments of TRU waste, resulting in the cleanup of 14 TRU waste generator sites around the country. WIPP trucks have travelled more than 16 million miles to and from generator sites, equivalent to more than 33 roundtrips to the moon. WIPP has safely disposed of more than 2 million cubic feet of waste – about a third of its legislated capacity.

“I congratulate everyone on 10 years of success,” said Washington TRU Solutions President and General Manager Farok Sharif. “Safety has been the focus from day one

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and WIPP has proven to the nation and the world that we can clean up the environment with the highest degree of safety.”

Long-time WIPP employee Bob Kehrman added, “There were many who thought WIPP would never open. Here we are 10 years later, successfully doing what we said we would. Our work has a real impact on people and national cleanup. When we step back and look at what we’ve done ... it’s a great feeling. We’re looking forward to the next 10 years!”

CBFO Chief Scientist Roger Nelson pointed back to a 1957 National Academy of Sciences report that first suggested salt beds for disposing of radioactive waste.

“To survive for millions of years, a large salt formation must be protected from water by natural barriers and these same barriers would also isolate waste placed within the salt,” said Nelson. “The Permian Salt Formation, in which WIPP is mined, has been here for 250 million years ... that’s before dinosaurs. Its longevity makes it the perfect place to dispose of waste safely away from people and the environment.”

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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