



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF **ENERGY**

U.S. Department of Energy
Carlsbad Field Office
Waste Isolation Pilot Plant
P.O. Box 3090
Carlsbad, New Mexico

Media Contact:

Deb Gill
U.S. DOE Carlsbad Field Office
(575) 234-7270

www.wipp.energy.gov

WIPP Monitoring Program Ensures Worker Safety

CARLSBAD, N.M., March 3, 2011 – Officials with the U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE’s) Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO) are citing the recent accreditation of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) Laboratory as a cause for reflection on the important role environmental monitoring has played during WIPP’s 12-year history.

In February, the WIPP Laboratory, which operates out of the Carlsbad Environmental Monitoring and Research Center (CEMRC), was accredited by the DOE’s Laboratory Accreditation Program for the fourth consecutive time. The lab received accreditation for conducting *in vitro* radiobioassay analysis – meaning it analyzes levels of radioactivity in the biological waste of radiological workers who might have come into contact with radiological material during the course of their job assignments at WIPP. To date, all radiobioassay monitoring results of WIPP workers are either negative or at the background levels indicating that the WIPP operations is extremely safe and protective of workers.

“The WIPP Lab plays a critical role in worker safety, which is paramount in DOE and WIPP operations,” said Acting CBFO Manager Ed Ziemianski. “We’re pleased to congratulate the Lab for both its accreditation and for its continued display of high-quality analytical capabilities.”

To receive accreditation, the laboratory must demonstrate its competence by meeting acceptance criteria on performance evaluation samples provided by DOE. The lab must also undergo and pass an extensive on-site audit every three years.

“The Department of Energy’s environmental monitoring program illustrates the DOE’s commitment to the safety of employees, members of the public and the environment,” said CBFO Office of Environment, Safety, and Health Director George Basabilvazo. “Repeat accreditation points to the high credibility of the WIPP Lab, which in turn credits the entire WIPP operation.”

“The WIPP Laboratory also participates in national programs that set high standards for analysis of samples related to air filters, water and soils to maintain proficiency and reliability,” noted DOE Health Physicist Dr. Hung-Cheng Chiou. “Participation in these high-quality programs allows the lab to meet or exceed DOE or permit requirements.”

CEMRC, a division of New Mexico State University’s Institute for Energy and the Environment, also conducts air and water monitoring, along with *in vivo* radiobioassay whole body counts of WIPP employees and other residents of the area. This independent monitoring agency publishes its annual results at cemrc.org. The WIPP Laboratory is managed by Safety Management Solutions, a URS subsidiary.

“All data results from the extensive environmental monitoring over the past 12 years, conducted by the WIPP Lab and CEMRC, have indicated that WIPP is being operated safely,” noted CBFO Chief Scientist Roger Nelson.

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant is a U.S. Department of Energy facility designed to safely isolate defense-related TRU 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 is located 26 miles outside of Carlsbad, N.M.

-DOE-

006DR0311