



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF **ENERGY**

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WIPP Marks 12 Years of Operations

CARLSBAD, N.M., March 28, 2011 – On Saturday, March 26, 2011, the Department of Energy’s Waste Isolation Pilot Plant marked another anniversary. It has now been 12 years since WIPP received its first shipment of transuranic (TRU) waste. TRU waste consists of clothing, tools, rags, debris, residues and other disposal items contaminated with radioactive elements – mostly plutonium.

“WIPP employees and members of the community cheered when the first shipment of TRU waste arrived here in 1999,” said Acting Carlsbad Field Office Manager Ed Ziemianski. “I applaud their continued dedication to our nation, which has placed its trust in WIPP to maintain those rigorous safety standards that made its opening possible.”

Since WIPP opened in 1999, more than 73,000 cubic meters of legacy TRU waste have been removed from temporary locations around the nation and shipped to WIPP for permanent underground disposal. To illustrate the significance of this cleanup effort, it would take more than 410 large-sized railway box cars to hold all of the waste now safely disposed at WIPP. DOE has completed legacy TRU waste cleanup from 17 sites around the country.

To date, WIPP drivers have traveled more than 11 million loaded miles and transported more than 9,300 shipments to WIPP. The communities along those shipping routes have benefitted through improvements to highways and high-level training provided to first

responders. WIPP also serves as a model for other developing national and international waste cleanup efforts.

In its 12th year of operations, WIPP will continue to lead efforts to reduce the nation's nuclear footprint. During the upcoming year, WIPP expects to receive its 10,000th shipment and to begin shipments of large boxed waste in the TRUPACT-III, a new shipping package scheduled for delivery this summer.

On the disposal side of the project, WIPP will complete waste emplacement in Panel 5 of its underground repository. The panels in WIPP's underground each consist of seven waste disposal rooms that are 300 feet long, 33 feet wide and 13 feet high. Panel 6 is already prepared to receive waste.

"There were many people involved in the making of this 12th anniversary milestone, and we appreciate the contributions of everyone associated with WIPP's success," Ziemianski said. "It's a collective tribute to all those involved, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, New Mexico Environment Department, communities across the state, CBFO and DOE Headquarters employees, Los Alamos National Laboratory, Sandia National Laboratories, state, county and local emergency response personnel along the transportation routes, and contractors—especially Washington TRU Solutions LLC, the WIPP management and operating contractor."

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.

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