



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF **ENERGY**

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WIPP Mine Rescue Team Wins Regional Contest

CARLSBAD, N.M., April 26, 2012 – Mine safety was the focus as 10 teams competed for top honors at the Southwestern Regional Mine Rescue Contest in Carlsbad, New Mexico last week. After three days of competition, the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) Blue Mine Rescue Team claimed the coveted first place trophy for the field contest.

The field contest involves a simulated mine rescue scenario that challenges team members to put their training to full use. Officials from the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration judged the timed exercise and awarded scores based on completion of key objectives, including successfully rescuing a victim.

“Our mine rescue teams are tops,” said U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Carlsbad Field Office Manager Joe Franco. “Their drive for continual improvement not only makes WIPP safer, it also raises the bar for mine safety throughout the nation. I’m very appreciative of the sacrifices these dedicated volunteers make to ensure we have mine rescue capabilities in the event an emergency arises.”

The WIPP teams also had success in other categories in the contest. The Blue Team placed second in both the team technician and first aid contests. The Red Team placed third in the team technician contest.

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The WIPP Blue Team included: Gary Kessler, team captain; Heath Fowler; Ty Zimmerly; Manny Marquez; Jim Pearce; Joe Baca; and Chauncey Ortega. The WIPP Red Team included: Matt Ridgway, team captain; Curtis Sanders; Kirk Nance; Mark Long; Fabian Carrasco; Doug Pitzer; and Nico Dominguez. Both teams were trained by Richard West.

The WIPP 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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