



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF **ENERGY**

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WIPP Employee Inducted Into Mine Rescue Hall of Fame - WIPP Teams Recognized at National Competition

CARLSBAD, N.M., August 2, 2013 - Long-time Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) employee Gary Kessler was inducted into the Metal/Non-Metal National Mine Rescue Hall of Fame on Aug. 1, 2013 at the biennial mine rescue competition in Reno, Nevada.

The Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) established the Hall of Fame to honor individuals with exceptional accomplishments and commitments in the field of mine rescue. MSHA also conducts mine rescue competitions at which WIPP's two mine rescue teams compete.

Kessler received the honor during a ceremony following the competition where his coworkers and he participated in the national championship. More than 30 teams from 13 states participated in the event. WIPP's Blue Team, which is captained by Kessler, finished fourth in the field competition while WIPP's Red Team narrowly missed making the competition finals. The Blue Team took second place in the first aid and sixth place in the technician categories. The Red Team took fifth place in the technician category.

“Our mine rescue teams have performed very well and their accomplishments are commendable,” said U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO) Manager Joe Franco. “We’re also pleased that MSHA recognized Gary with this honor and congratulate him on the achievement. Mine safety is critical to our mission and I appreciate the skill and dedication of the mine rescue teams to providing extremely well-trained emergency response for our workers, facility, community and entire industry. As Manager for the WIPP Mine Rescue teams in 1997 through 1999, I understand Gary’s accomplishments and am very proud of him and the two teams.” CBFO has responsibility for WIPP and the National Transuranic (TRU) Program.

Kessler, with Nuclear Waste Partnership, LLC, the WIPP management and operating contractor, began his mining career at WIPP in 1988. Since 1994, he has served as captain of a WIPP mine rescue team. Mine rescue teams often participate in various regional and state competitions each year to hone their skills, share lessons learned and continually raise the level of mine safety in the world. Kessler has competed in at least three regional competitions a year for the last 25 years and has competed in 12 national contests that are held every two years. In 1994, he was part of the WIPP Blue Team that won the national title.

Kessler is an MSHA-certified mine rescue trainer and has provided his expertise to numerous mine rescue teams in the country. He has taken part in rescues in New Mexico in an inactive gold mine shaft in Socorro, in an abandoned mine shaft near Oro Grande and in a cave near Carlsbad. On two occasions, under his leadership, his team has served as the backup group staged on the surface while teams from local potash mines have responded to mine fires.

WIPP mine rescue team members serve on a voluntary basis in addition to their regular jobs. Management and co-workers work around schedules so team members are available for training and competitions.

“We’re extremely proud of our mine rescue teams and all they achieved this year,” said NWP, LLC President and Project Manager Farok Sharif. “These hard-working, dedicated individuals exemplify the world-class employees we have at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant. I am also happy for Gary Kessler and his induction into the Hall of Fame. This honor reflects the tremendous impact he has had throughout the mining industry. Not only does Gary care deeply about his fellow employees, but he also cares about the safety of every man and woman who puts on a miner’s lamp and spends their day working in a mine.”

With his induction, Kessler became the third member of the Mine Rescue Hall of Fame from WIPP. Previous inductees include Buddy Webb in 2000 and Joe Baca in 2010.

The WIPP is a DOE 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, which began waste disposal operations in 1999, is located 26 miles outside of Carlsbad, N.M.

PHOTO CAPTION: Waste Isolation Pilot Plant Blue Mine Rescue Team Captain Gary Kessler (right) receives an award from Neal Merrifield, administrator for the Mine Safety and Health Administration Metal/Non-Metal mines, after Kessler was inducted into the National Mine Rescue Hall of Fame on Aug. 1, 2013.