



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF **ENERGY**

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Radiological Monitoring Continues at WIPP

CARLSBAD, N.M., February 19, 2014 – Radiological control personnel continue to collect surface and underground monitoring samples at the U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) after an underground air monitor detected airborne radiation around 11:30 p.m. (MT) on February 14.

Recent laboratory analyses by Carlsbad Environmental Monitoring and Research Center (CEMRC) found some trace amounts of americium and plutonium from a sampling station located on the WIPP access road. This is consistent with the fact that HEPA filters remove at least 99.97% of contaminants from the air, meaning a minute amount still can pass through the filters. As noted by the CEMRC, an independent environmental monitoring organization, the levels found from the sample are below the levels established by the Environmental Protection Agency to ensure public health is protected.

DOE remains focused on public, worker and environmental health and safety. The Department has appointed an Accident Investigation Board – comprised of DOE, Mine Safety, and Health Administration officials, supported by various subject matter expert advisors in areas including fire protection, ventilation and mine safety – to assess and investigate this event.

WIPP is developing a plan to safely re-enter the WIPP underground facility. Radiological professionals from other DOE locations and National Laboratories are also assisting in recovery efforts,

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as requested by the Carlsbad Field Office, which has responsibility for WIPP and the National Transuranic Program.

No transuranic waste shipments to WIPP were scheduled for February 14 through March 10 due to an annual maintenance outage. At this time shipments have been suspended, and there are no immediate effects on other cleanup sites.

WIPP is a DOE facility designed to safely isolate defense-related transuranic waste from the public and the environment. WIPP, which began waste disposal operations in 1999, is located 26 miles outside of Carlsbad, N.M. Since operations began almost 15 years ago, the facility has cleaned 22 DOE sites of legacy transuranic waste.