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SEE HOW WE RUN

At WIPP, We Really Mean Business

CARLSBAD, N.M., December 10, 2001 – Early this year, Dr. Inés Triay, manager of the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Carlsbad Field Office, challenged Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) employees to operate the nation's first nuclear waste repository like a business. So, what do we mean when we say we run WIPP "like a business?"

Is it the organizational charts? Production schedules? It's more about the innovators who are WIPP employees. For perspective, remember that WIPP's organizational culture is shaped by years of focused determination to prove the safety, science and technology of a deep geologic repository. Dedicated employees overcame years of delays and criticism that the repository might never open.

Running WIPP like a business depends day-to-day on safety as the No.1 priority coupled with an inventive employee spirit that loves a challenge. Technicians for Westinghouse TRU Solutions LLC (WTS), the management and operating contractor for DOE at WIPP, increased waste shipments processed from one to two weekly in 2000 to 14 weekly in 2001. The waste-handling process efficiency improved by 57 percent, reducing the overall cycle time from seven to three hours. Cycle time is measured between receipt of a shipment of transuranic waste until release of the truck to pick up another load from a generator site. How did they do that? Primarily, operators introduced parallel dock operations to process three TRUPACT-II containers simultaneously.

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Employees readily adopt the best business practices available. If "best available" doesn't meet requirements, WTS innovators consistently develop new technology that does. As examples, dedicated TRUPACT-II and HalfPACT shipping containers were engineered and manufactured locally to U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) standards. There's an innovative second half to the story.

The HalfPACT container, the product of ingenious engineers, aptly named for half the weight and height of the TRUPACT-II, is projected to save up to $67 million in shipping and labor costs through the life of the project. Why? If so-called "heavy drums" are loaded into TRUPACT-II containers, those shipments would exceed U.S. Department of Transportation cargo weight limits. Or, those restricted shipments would result in expensive partial loads.

Three fully loaded HalfPACTs fit perfectly on WIPP trucks without exceeding load weight limits. Because the design allows for shipping more heavy drums per load than the TRUPACT-II container, an estimated 2,000 shipments of waste are eliminated over the life of the project. The secret is the difference in weight between the full-size container and the HalfPACT.

The latest shipping container design demonstrates how engineers and scientists planned for safe disposal of both types of transuranic waste – contact-handled (CH) and remote-handled (RH). The NRC recently approved the RH-72B shipping cask, developed to transport RH-TRU waste, which requires more shielding than CH-TRU waste. Other federal and state approvals are required before the RH-72B cask technology can be used at 10 DOE sites that contain RH-TRU waste.

Other examples of best business practices? Take a look at year-end procurement and subcontracting performance for categories of small, women-owned and/or minority-owned and disadvantaged businesses:

- **Small Businesses: [Goal: 75%] Actual 76%**
- **Women-Owned Businesses [Goal: 8%] Actual 11%**

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- **Small and Disadvantaged Businesses [Goal: 25%] Actual 29%**
- **SBA 8(a) Certified Business Contracts [Goal: 5%] Actual 4%**
- **HubZone Businesses (Economically Disadvantaged) [Goal: 4%] Actual 4%**

The WTS procurement team met or exceeded goals in four of the five established categories. Contractor goals are set cooperatively with DOE to promote and support small and disadvantaged businesses. These programs assist with growth of companies owned by individuals who are socially and economically disadvantaged.

"We are very proud of our achievement in this area," said Jose Legarreta, manager of Procurement and Property Services for WTS. "By the way, we've maintained a similar track record for the past 10 years and, currently, we have the *highest* goals in the entire DOE complex."

Cycle time, again. Improvements in processing time for purchase of materials and services are projected to save up to $230,000 annually. WTS purchasing innovators adopted commercial tools such as credit cards and blanket purchase orders. A paperless system that is also from the commercial sector is planned for purchases of less than $5,000.

Smart businesses focus on what they do best. Westinghouse innovators discovered how to reduce bulk mailing costs to 17 percent of the original price – by using a small Carlsbad business that specializes in mailing services. More than 800 stakeholders had to be notified about a proposal to modify a hazardous waste permit. Finding specialists saved both labor and material costs.

Internet technology avoided thousand of dollars in labor and fees to employment recruiters when WTS human resources innovators targeted technical employment markets online. WTS avoided costs of $300,000 or more by using Internet job boards and other posting sites for recruiting engineers, scientists and other technical employees. With ongoing activities such as recruiting and hiring, returns on labor cost avoidance and improved productivity increase significantly.

WIPP is projected to save more than $14 million over the next decade by installing a fully integrated financial management system. Innovators are designing a system to eliminate duplicated information and incompatible technology. A new financial system will ensure accuracy and reliability of information, as well as reduced cycle time for information retrieval.

Why is it important to run WIPP like a business? Continually seeking out the best available business practices or developing better standards makes great business sense, particularly because WIPP operates with taxpayer dollars.

WIPP, a cornerstone of DOE's cleanup effort, is the nation's first repository for the permanent disposal of defense-generated transuranic radioactive waste left from the research and production of nuclear weapons.

Located in southeastern New Mexico, 26 miles east of Carlsbad, project facilities include disposal rooms excavated in an ancient, stable salt formation 2,150 feet (almost one-half mile) underground. Waste disposal operations began at WIPP March 26, 1999.

Transuranic waste consists of clothing, tools, rags, debris, residues and other disposable items contaminated with radioactive elements, mostly plutonium. For more information about WIPP, call 1-800-336-9477, or visit the WIPP Web site at http://www.wipp.ws.

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