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For Immediate Release

50,000 Containers Safely Disposed at WIPP

CARLSBAD, N.M., December 18, 2003 – The U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) safely disposed its 50,000th container of defense-generated transuranic (TRU) waste on Wednesday, according to Dr. Inés Triay, manager of DOE's Carlsbad Field Office.

"Our workers have safely processed more than 2,200 waste shipments from six DOE sites in less than five years," said Triay. "This is truly a project milestone, one that I am proud to have been part of. I salute their dedication to safety."

Since 1999, WIPP has received more than 16,800 cubic meters of TRU waste from the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site, Colorado; Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory, Idaho; Savannah River Site, South Carolina; Los Alamos National Laboratory, New Mexico; Hanford Site, Washington, and Argonne National Laboratory, Illinois.

"To appreciate the magnitude of this accomplishment," said Triay, "50,000 waste containers would fill an area roughly the size of six football fields. We have a hard working group of people dedicated to protecting the public and the environment. Disposal of the 50,000th waste container without a serious safety incident demonstrates that our operations are safe."

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

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