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State of New Mexico Issues Permit For Remote-Handled Waste at WIPP
Enables DOE to Permanently Move Waste to the WIPP Repository for Safe Disposal

CARLSBAD, NM – U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) today announced that the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) issued a revised hazardous waste facility permit for DOE's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in Carlsbad, New Mexico. The revised permit enables WIPP to receive and dispose of remote-handled (RH) transuranic (TRU) radioactive waste currently stored at DOE clean-up sites across the country. WIPP expects to receive its first RH-TRU waste shipment in the coming months, as soon as the regulatory approvals are obtained.

"WIPP is a key element of the safe cleanup of this nation's defense waste and the significance of this permit, which enables the Department to continue its cleanup momentum, cannot be understated," said James Rispoli, DOE Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management. "Through state and federal efforts, the Department will move forward to permanently and safely deliver waste stored at DOE facilities to WIPP's safe underground repository."

NMED Secretary Ron Curry was joined by New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, State Senator Carroll Leavell, State Representative John Heaton, Dr. Inés Triay, Chief Operating Officer for DOE's Environmental Management Program, and community leaders and WIPP employees for a permit signing ceremony in Carlsbad.

"I want to thank Secretary Curry, his staff and the citizens of this state, who worked so diligently to produce a sound, responsible permit," Dr. Dave Moody, Manager of the DOE Carlsbad Field Office, said. "I also would like to thank the communities of southeast New Mexico whose confidence in the WIPP project was evidenced throughout the public hearings."

Since opening in 1999, more than 83,000 containers of contact-handled TRU waste have been safely disposed in WIPP's half-mile deep repository. WIPP was designed for the safe disposal of both contact-handled and remote-handled TRU waste. Central to the permit issued today is removal of the ban on disposal of remote-handled TRU waste at WIPP. Other revisions to the permit include alternate methods for analyzing wastes prior to shipment to WIPP, increased container storage areas aboveground, more efficient methods for monitoring volatile organic compounds in the repository, a new dispute resolution process, and an e-mail notification system to inform the public of various permit-related activities.

WIPP 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 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.

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