



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF **ENERGY**

U.S. Department of Energy
Carlsbad Field Office
Waste Isolation Pilot Plant
P.O. Box 3090
Carlsbad, New Mexico 88221

Media Contact:

Roger Nelson
U.S. DOE Carlsbad Field Office
(575) 234-7213

www.wipp.energy.gov

For Immediate Release

DOE Initiates EPA Recertification Process

CARLSBAD, N.M., March 24, 2009 – Ten years after the start of disposal operations, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) will demonstrate its continued compliance with U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations for radioactive waste disposal. Today, DOE submitted its second Compliance Recertification Application (CRA) to EPA, initiating a recertification process required by Congress.

“This application is a reflection of the high quality work that has been done at WIPP for a decade,” says Carlsbad Field Office Manager Dave Moody. “We operate to strict environmental and safety requirements designed to protect workers, the public and the environment.”

The EPA first certified WIPP compliance in May 1998. The initial Compliance Certification Application demonstrated how the geological, hydrological, physical, chemical and environmental characteristics of the site, along with engineered features of the facility, would safely contain radioactive waste for a 10,000-year regulatory time period.

DOE is required by law to submit documentation of continued compliance at five year intervals until the facility is decommissioned. The first five-year period began on March 26, 1999, when WIPP received its first waste shipment. The recertification process

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is not a reconsideration of the decision to open WIPP, but rather a process to verify that changes at WIPP in the preceding five-year period comply with EPA disposal standards for radioactive waste. EPA last recertified WIPP in March 2006.

Today's submittal by DOE begins a two-step process. The first step is for EPA to determine the completeness of the application or request additional information for its review. The EPA will also consider public comments on the CRA. EPA requests for information, DOE responses and the CRA-2009 application will all be available on the EPA's WIPP Web site: (www.epa.gov/radiation/wipp).

Once EPA decides the package is complete, the agency has six months to perform a technical evaluation and reach a final decision regarding WIPP's compliance with the waste disposal regulations.

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant is a U.S. Department of Energy facility designed to safely isolate defense-related transuranic 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.

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