



# U.S. DEPARTMENT OF **ENERGY**

U.S. Department of Energy  
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## **WIPP Panel 7 Certified and Ready for Waste Disposal**

**CARLSBAD, N.M.**, August 1, 2013 - In mid-July 2013, the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) approved the use of Panel 7 for disposal of defense-related transuranic (TRU) waste at the Department of Energy (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). Approval by NMED for each underground waste disposal panel prior to use is required under the WIPP Hazardous Waste Facility Permit (Permit). A panel consists of seven waste disposal rooms and each room is approximately 13 feet high, 33 feet wide and 300 feet long. Mining and outfitting, which includes installation of electricity, monitoring equipment and air regulating bulkheads, of a panel takes about two to two and a half years. Once the mining and outfitting are completed, the panel is certified by a professional engineer registered in N.M. The Permit requires the certification and submittal of related documentation to the NMED Secretary for review and approval. The NMED then conducts an inspection to verify that the panel is constructed in compliance with the Permit requirements. "We're very pleased by the NMED documentation review and its timely approval of Panel 7 for use," DOE Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO) Manager Joe Franco said. CBFO has responsibility for WIPP and the National TRU Program.

"We may begin using the panel in August," Franco said. "Timing on the NMED approval is important because it allows for WIPP to start using Panel 7 to continue to provide defense-

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related TRU waste cleanup for the nation,” he emphasized. A panel naturally begins to close in at a rate of about three to six inches a year, which is the salt rock behavior anticipated to facilitate permanently encapsulating the waste and removal from the biosphere. WIPP is currently emplacing TRU waste in Panel 6. When Panel 6 is full, WIPP will begin emplacing shipments of waste in Panel 7. Panel 7 approval allows WIPP to continue to fulfill its regulatory commitments, including: the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) framework agreement with the State of N.M. to remove the above-ground TRU waste currently stored at Area G at LANL by June 30, 2014; and the settlement agreement between the DOE, U.S. Navy and State of Idaho for the disposition of mutually agreed upon CH- and RH-TRU waste stored at the Idaho National Laboratory by Dec. 31, 2018. WIPP, located 26 miles outside of Carlsbad, N.M., is a DOE facility designed to safely isolate defense-related TRU 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, has cleaned 22 sites of legacy TRU waste.

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