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For Immediate Release

Nitrate Waste Stream Isolated at WIPP

CARLSBAD, NM – Today, the Department of Energy (DOE) and the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) announced the isolation of all waste containers from the Los Alamos National Laboratory nitrate salt bearing waste stream that was determined to be responsible for the 2014 radiological release. Closure of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) Panel 7, Room 7 was completed on May 29, following the initial closure of Panel 6 on May 13, in compliance with NMED's Administrative Order.

"This milestone illustrates DOE's commitment to safely recover WIPP in a manner that increases worker safety and protects the public and the environment," said Joe Franco, DOE's Carlsbad Field Office Manager. "The DOE and its contractors at WIPP will continue to safely implement the recovery plan as we work toward resuming operations at WIPP."

Shortly after the February 14, 2014, radiological release, NMED issued an Administrative Order that required the expedited closure of Panel 7, Room 7, as well as the initial closure of Panel 6. A DOE Accident Investigation Board report issued in April concluded that the release was caused by an exothermic reaction involving a mixture of organic materials and nitrate salts in one of the waste drums.

"We are very pleased to see the closure of all underground areas that contain the nitrate salt bearing waste stream responsible for last year's radiological release at WIPP," said NMED Secretary Ryan Flynn. "New Mexico will continue to ensure that all necessary steps are taken in accordance with the Administrative Order as WIPP continues the recovery in a safe manner."

Both closures involved the installation of intake side and exhaust side steel bulkheads, preceded by chain link and brattice cloth, along with 10 feet of mined salt backfill for the initial closure of Panel 6. As an added precaution, continuous air monitors were added in front of each bulkhead at the closed panels.

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