



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:

Deb Gill
U.S. DOE Carlsbad Field Office
(575) 234-7270
www.wipp.energy.gov

For Immediate Release

WIPP Receives 8,000th TRU Waste Shipment

CARLSBAD, N.M., Nov. 5, 2009 - The U.S. Department of Energy's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) near Carlsbad, N.M., received its 8,000th shipment of transuranic waste late Wednesday. The milestone shipment from Los Alamos National Laboratory will be safely and permanently disposed in WIPP's underground repository, nearly one-half mile below the surface.

"Reaching this milestone is a testament to the Department's commitment to cleaning up and reducing the nation's nuclear waste footprint. The dedication to safety of all of the staff at WIPP and cleanup sites around the country has been critical to this effort, which has made the nation a cleaner, safer place for all of its citizens," said DOE Carlsbad Field Office Manager Dave Moody.

Just four hours after the 8,000th shipment rolled through the gates, WIPP received its 300th shipment of remote-handled transuranic – or TRU – waste from the Vallecitos Nuclear Center in California. The dual accomplishments highlight the accelerated national cleanup efforts made possible under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

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TRU waste, a byproduct of the nation's nuclear defense program, consists of tools, rags, protective clothing, sludge, soil and other materials contaminated with radioactive elements that have atomic numbers greater than uranium. Most of the 8,000 shipments were of contact-handled TRU waste, which does not require shielding to safely handle, transport and emplace. The 300 canisters of remote-handled waste have been shipped in shielded casks and emplaced within the walls of the underground repository due to their higher radiation dose rates.

Every WIPP shipment of TRU waste meets all U.S. Department of Transportation requirements and WIPP's drivers must pass stringent training requirements. Shipment protocols were developed through cooperative efforts with states, tribal governments and the U.S. Department of Energy. Shipments are also monitored, via satellite, at all times. To date, WIPP drivers have logged more than 9 million miles without a serious injury or release of radioactive material.

WIPP celebrated 10 years of safe operations this year and completion of TRU waste cleanup at 15 generator sites in 12 states. The first shipment to WIPP in 1999 was also from Los Alamos National Laboratory in northern New Mexico.

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.