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DOENews



For Immediate Release
**DOE to Hold Public Meetings
On Draft Environmental Assessment**

Carlsbad, N.M., October 26, 2000 – The public is invited to comment on a draft environmental assessment for conducting astrophysics and other basic scientific experiments at the U.S. Department of Energy's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). The October 23 release of the draft environmental assessment begins a formal review process that includes a 30-day public comment period and two separate public information meetings.

Public meetings are scheduled for November 14 in Santa Fe and November 16 in Carlsbad. Written comments will be accepted through November 22.

The meetings are being held in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Each meeting will begin with a short presentation, followed by a question and answer period and opportunity for the public to provide verbal comments on the draft environmental assessment.

The Santa Fe public meeting will be held at the Holiday Inn, 4048 Cerrillos Road. The meeting will consist of two sessions – from 2 to 5 p.m. and from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. The Carlsbad meeting will take place at the Skeen-Whitlock Building, 4021 National Parks Highway, and also will include two sessions – from 2 to 5 p.m. and from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.

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All written comments should be sent to Mr. Harold Johnson, NEPA Compliance Officer, U.S. Department of Energy, Carlsbad Field Office, P.O. Box 3090, Carlsbad, NM 88221. Mr. Johnson will also accept comments via e-mail at johnsoh@wipp.carlsbad.nm.us. Brief verbal comments may also be telephoned to the WIPP Information Center at 1-800-336-9477. Copies of the draft environmental assessment may also be obtained by calling this toll-free number.

The public can obtain more information on the draft environmental assessment by logging onto the WIPP Home Page, <http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>.

WIPP, a cornerstone of the DOE's cleanup effort, is designed to permanently dispose of defense-generated transuranic radioactive waste left from the research and production of nuclear weapons.

Located in southeastern New Mexico, 26 miles east of Carlsbad, project facilities include disposal rooms excavated in an ancient, stable salt formation 2,150 feet (almost one-half mile) underground. Waste disposal operations began at WIPP March 26, 1999.

Transuranic waste consists of clothing, tools, rags, debris, residues, and other disposable items contaminated with radioactive elements, mostly plutonium.

Los Alamos news release

A Department Of Energy/University of California Laboratory

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SUPERHENC TO SAVE MILLIONS IN COLORADO

LOS ALAMOS, N.M., Oct. 25, 2000 — Los Alamos National Laboratory's SuperHENC waste characterization tool has been delivered to the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site (Rocky Flats) near Denver, Colorado.

SuperHENC, the Super High Efficiency Neutron Coincidence counter, will eventually allow Rocky Flats dismantlement workers to begin loading Standard Waste Boxes without segregating different materials. Use of SuperHENC not only will reduce the potential for worker radiation exposure, but the device may help speed up the dismantlement schedule and save an estimated \$100 million in the cost of the Rocky Flats remediation.

SuperHENC is a trailer-mounted passive neutron counter that can measure the trace amounts of plutonium present in mixtures of metals, combustibles, and debris packed in SWBs. The instrument provides accurate measurements of transuranic waste and certification of waste for disposal at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in Carlsbad, N.M.

The system includes a SWB handling capability and weight indicator device or load cell that can handle and measure loads up to 5,000 pounds, and yet is more accurate than the current WIPP Quality Assurance Objectives for smaller packages.

SuperHENC works by counting the neutrons produced by the spontaneous fission of the plutonium isotopes. The neutron counting process, called coincidence counting, uses special electronic circuitry to distinguish between the neutrons emitted two or three at a time by the fission process, and the typically single, random neutrons emitted by alpha particle reactions. By analyzing the number of double or triple neutrons recorded by a counter within a specified period — usually around 128 micro seconds — workers can determine the plutonium content of the material in the SWBs.

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Currently, three commercial vendors have begun the licensing procedure to manufacture more SuperHENC devices. Because of the quality of the current system, none are likely to make any modifications to the Los Alamos design.

SuperHENC is part of a family of sophisticated detectors designed by Los Alamos scientists to aid in the management and control of nuclear materials and wastes.

SuperHENC is the result of a collaboration among members of the Laboratory's Safeguards Science and Technology Group, the Advanced Nuclear Technology group, the Environmental Science and Technology Program and the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site. Funding was provided by the DOE through the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site. Additional funding came through an Accelerated Site Technology Deployment project from the DOE's Office of Science.

Los Alamos National Laboratory is operated by the University of California for the Department of Energy.