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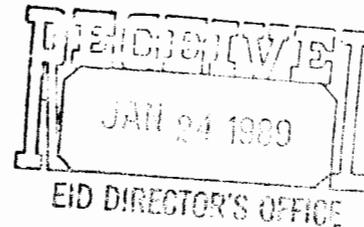
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 19, 1989

DOE SEEKS LAND WITHDRAWAL FOR WASTE ISOLATION PILOT PLANT

The Department of Energy today initiated an administrative "land withdrawal" procedure as part of a dual-track effort to permit the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant to open for a demonstration program by the end of the year.

The department also has asked specifically that the Department of the Interior, which administers public lands, not make the withdrawal effective until the end of the first session of the 101st Congress so that Congress will have time to act on land withdrawal legislation.

DOE believes that legislation is preferable to administrative withdrawal and is committed to working with Congress to obtain it. DOE announced on December 16, 1988, that it would ask DOI for administrative action in case Congress does not act on a bill by the end of the year.

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DOE's request for administrative withdrawal was made in a letter from Troy Wade, DOE's Acting Assistant Secretary for Defense Programs, to J. Steven Griles, Assistant Secretary for Lands & Minerals Management at the Department of Interior DOI.

In the letter, DOE outlined several key actions which must be completed before land withdrawal could take effect.

Before WIPP is ready to receive wastes for the experimental program, DOE has specified that it will complete several additional activities. Those include: issuance of a Final Safety Analysis Report for the facility; resolution of issues related to compliance with the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act and the National Environmental Policy Act; completion of the experimental program plan; and Nuclear Regulatory Commission certification of the TRUPACT II shipping container.

The public land order under which DOE is constructing the WIPP was issued by the DOI in 1983 and expires in June, 1991. The order permits construction at the site but does not permit receipt of radioactive waste into the facility. A modification to the order is being requested to permit the use of radioactive waste for the test and demonstration phase.

The DOE also asked that the order be extended to June 1997, which would allow for a five year phase during which experiments will be conducted to determine whether WIPP can be used as a permanent repository for transuranic waste from the nation's weapons production program. If the site is found unsuitable for permanent disposal, DOE then would have three years in which to remove the waste.

The WIPP project, under construction since 1983, is an underground facility located within a 10,240 acre site near Carlsbad, New Mexico. It is designed to demonstrate safe disposal of radioactive wastes generated by the DOE's defense program.

The WIPP facility is expected to be ready to receive waste for the test phase by August 1989. DOE has begun action to obtain legislative or administrative land withdrawal now because of the time required to complete the procedural steps necessary in either case.

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