

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
CARLSBAD AREA OFFICE
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CARLSBAD, NEW MEXICO 88221

DOENEWS:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

IDAHO LABORATORY TO CONDUCT RADIOACTIVE TESTS FOR WIPP

CARLSBAD, N. M., May 6, 1994 -- The U. S. Department of Energy (DOE) Carlsbad Area Office announced today that Idaho National Engineering Laboratory (INEL) has been selected as the facility where laboratory tests will be performed with transuranic wastes to provide data on waste gas generation.

Results from the tests will be used in performance assessment computer models that will help determine if the DOE's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) is suitable to permanently dispose of some defense-generated radioactive waste.

Planned underground radioactive tests at the WIPP were canceled by the DOE in October 1993 because of questions raised by the National Academy of Sciences and other independent reviewers. Tests with both simulated and radioactive wastes are needed to comply with requirements of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), WIPP's primary regulator.

In announcing their decision, DOE officials said that by conducting tests in a laboratory, the needed technical data will be collected more quickly and at a lower cost. According to DOE estimates, these tests will cost approximately \$10 million over a two-year period, as compared to the previously planned \$200 million to \$300 million test program at the WIPP. The experimental program is expected to begin in June 1994 and be completed by December 1996.

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WIPP file

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**Idaho Laboratory To Conduct
Radioactive Tests For WIPP**

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The WIPP is a research and development facility operated by the DOE's Carlsbad Area Office, located 26 miles east of Carlsbad. It is designed to demonstrate the safe transport, handling and disposal of some defense-generated radioactive waste. Project facilities include excavated rooms 2,150 feet below the earth's surface in ancient bedded salt rock.

By doing tests in a laboratory, repository-like conditions can be simulated, thereby helping the DOE meet regulatory requirements established by the EPA in a more cost effective and timely manner. Laboratory data will help build a solid scientific foundation for the WIPP facility, allowing for an earlier disposal decision.

A competitive bid process was performed by the DOE before INEL was selected as the laboratory that will perform the radioactive tests.

INEL is one of the nation's largest laboratories with strong technical capabilities in waste management, environmental restoration, and research and testing. The 890 square-mile site, located near Idaho Falls, consists of 10 major facility areas.

Radioactive waste already characterized for disposal at the WIPP, similar to that stored at other DOE sites and the INEL, are readily available for this experimental program. This was a major factor in the selection of the INEL, along with the cost-effectiveness of its proposed approach.

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