

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
CARLSBAD AREA OFFICE
WASTE ISOLATION PILOT PLANT
P. O. BOX 3090
CARLSBAD, NEW MEXICO 88221

Steve E
To Be Ho
WIPP Pme
WIPP

DOENEWS:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DOE CLOSES PORTION OF WIPP UNDERGROUND EXPERIMENTAL AREA

CARLSBAD, N.M., Sept. 28 -- The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Carlsbad Area Office today announced that it has closed part of the underground experimental area at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP).

According to George Dials, manager of the Carlsbad Area Office, the northeast area of the WIPP underground was closed to personnel earlier this month because all pertinent geotechnical data have been collected to support the operation of the WIPP.

"A majority of nonradioactive tests needed to determine the suitability of the WIPP as a nuclear waste repository, have been done," said Dials. "It just makes sense, from both the safety and economic aspects, to remove that area from routine human access."

Experiments in the northeast end of the WIPP underground involved the study of salt rock closure and movement. Creep, or movement, of the salt is monitored to see how long it will take to encapsulate and isolate the waste after it has been placed underground. Data collection in the northwest area of the WIPP underground is anticipated to be completed by mid-1996, with closure to begin soon thereafter.

The northern end of the WIPP underground was mined in the early 1980s specifically as an area for nonradioactive experiments where scientists studied the geologic characteristics of the proposed nuclear waste repository. Radioactive experiments are being conducted at Los Alamos National Laboratory and the Idaho National Engineering Laboratories.

Phase I of the Experimental Area Management Plan was completed earlier this month, said Rick Sowers, Westinghouse Electric Corporation's manager of mine operations. It took underground operations

-MORE-



Printed on recycled paper

950924



DOE Closes Portion Of WIPP
Underground Experimental Area

-2-

personnel about two months to salvage instruments and wiring from the WIPP underground. Only the items that could be safely removed were salvaged. The area has been barricaded to prevent access.

The WIPP is a research and development facility operated by the Carlsbad Area Office. Located in southeastern New Mexico, it is designed to demonstrate the safe, permanent disposal of transuranic radioactive waste left from the production of nuclear weapons. Project facilities include excavated rooms 2,150 feet below the earth's surface in an ancient, stable salt formation.

When all applicable state and federal environmental regulations have been met, the Secretary of Energy is expected to make a decision in January 1998 to open the WIPP as the nation's first deep geologic nuclear waste repository.

Westinghouse's Waste Isolation Division serves as the management and operating contractor for the DOE at the WIPP. For more information on the mine closure or other WIPP-related questions, please call 1-800-336-WIPP (9477).

19DR0795

-DOE-

Contact: Patty Baratti-Sallani
Public Affairs Officer
U.S. Department of Energy
Carlsbad Area Office
(505) 234-7313

Donavan Mager
Senior Media Coordinator
Westinghouse Electric Corporation
Waste Isolation Division
(505) 234-8347