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# DOENEWS:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## DOE ACCELERATES SCHEDULE TO OPEN THE WIPP

CARLSBAD, N.M., Oct. 20 -- The acceleration of regulatory activities by the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Carlsbad Area Office will allow for an earlier decision to begin nuclear waste disposal operations at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP).

The DOE had originally scheduled January 1998 for the Secretary of Energy to make a decision to open the WIPP as the nation's first deep geologic nuclear waste repository. That schedule has been accelerated by two months, to Oct. 31, 1997, said George Dials, Manager of the Carlsbad Area Office, which oversees the WIPP project.

"In July, U.S. Rep. Dan Schaefer (R-CO) asked me to look at the current schedule to see if we could start waste operations any sooner," said George Dials, Manager of the Carlsbad Area Office. "We looked at the WIPP Disposal Decision Plan and found that, through process improvement and by conducting more activities in parallel, the DOE will be in a position to make a decision earlier than originally planned."

"I am confident that we can achieve this schedule and open the WIPP, which is essential if we are to begin solving this nation's nuclear waste problem."

Schaefer serves on the House Commerce Committee and is the chair of the subcommittee on Energy and Power. The lawmaker is also co-sponsoring legislation that will speed up the opening of the WIPP. U.S. Rep. Joe Skeen (R-NM) and U.S. Rep. Mike Crapo (D-Idaho) are coauthors of House Bill 1663, which, if passed by Congress, will help open the WIPP sooner.

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Submission of the final Compliance Certification Application is one of the key regulatory milestones that will allow the DOE to make an earlier disposal decision, said Dials. The document is scheduled to be presented to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in October 1996.

"This is a significant change that will allow us to open the facility sooner," said Dials. "The decision for an earlier submission was made after all program participants reviewed the schedule and agreed that the final compliance document could be submitted to the EPA two months sooner."

The WIPP, located 26 miles east of Carlsbad, is a proposed repository for defense-generated nuclear waste remaining from defense-related activities. Project facilities include disposal rooms mined 2,150 feet underground in an ancient, stable salt formation. Upon certification by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), expected in October 1997, the WIPP will begin disposal operations in April 1998.

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