

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

To B *Steve Z*
CONTACT: Patty Baratti-Sallani
(505) 234-7313
Dan Balduini
(505) 234-8658
Karen Deike
(303) 623-9378

DOENEWS:

DOE AND WESTERN STATES SIGN MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT FOR SAFE SHIPMENTS TO WIPP

CARLSBAD, N.M., March 28 -- Secretary of Energy Hazel O'Leary and Nebraska Gov. E. Benjamin Nelson, chairman of the Western Governors' Association, have signed a memorandum of agreement on how transuranic waste will be shipped to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) near Carlsbad, NM.

The agreement states how the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) will use the regional protocols to safely transport transuranic waste to the WIPP, scheduled to begin receiving waste in April 1998.

The memorandum of agreement is intended to enhance the safety of transuranic waste transport, endorse the principles and procedures contained in the Western Governors' Association WIPP Transportation Safety Program Implementation Guide, and ensure communication between the Secretary of Energy, the Manager of the DOE-Carlsbad Area Office, and the western state governors on transuranic waste transportation issues. The regional planning and dialogue process facilitated by the Western Governors' Association provides member states and the DOE with the mechanism to address WIPP and other DOE transportation issues. Each state appoints a representative to the Western Governors' Association Technical Advisory Group for WIPP Transport.

Elements of the program address such areas as accident prevention, emergency preparedness, route designation, and public involvement. Managing the safe transportation of waste to the WIPP is the joint responsibility of federal, state, local, and tribal governments.

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**DOE/Western Governors' Association
Memorandum of Agreement****-2-**

The Carlsbad Area Office works with the Western Governors' Association and the 11 shipping corridor states to conduct the WIPP shipping campaign employing standards and procedures negotiated through the 1991 DOE/Western Governors' Association Cooperative Agreement, many of which are above federal regulatory requirements.

"This memorandum of agreement reaffirms the commitment made by the DOE and the western states to ensure the safe transport of waste to the WIPP," said Carlsbad Area Office Manager George E. Dials. "The western governors are actively involved in the WIPP program, and together we are ensuring operation of the safest possible nuclear waste transportation system available."

"Our goal is to have every one of the estimated 31,000 shipments of nuclear waste to WIPP be routine and uneventful," Nelson said. "At the same time, western governors are committed to ensuring that appropriate state, local, and tribal personnel are properly trained and equipped to handle any emergency that may arise."

The WIPP is designed to permanently dispose of transuranic radioactive waste left from the research and development of nuclear weapons. Located 26 miles east of Carlsbad, project facilities include disposal rooms excavated 2,150 feet (nearly half a mile) underground in an ancient, stable salt formation. Transuranic waste consists of clothing, tools, rags, and other such items contaminated with trace amounts of radioactive elements, mostly plutonium.

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