

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY  
CARLSBAD AREA OFFICE  
WASTE ISOLATION PILOT PLANT  
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# DOENEWS:

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## For Immediate Release

### **Analysis of WIPP's Long-Term Performance to Undergo Joint International Peer Review**

CARLSBAD, N.M., June 7, 1996 -- An agreement signed today in Paris, France, sets into motion the first ever joint international peer review involving the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA), and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The agencies will combine worldwide scientific expertise to review the DOE Carlsbad Area Office analysis of the long-term performance of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP).

Requested by the Carlsbad Area Office, this peer review is a first for the NEA and the IAEA. The two agencies typically offer such services separately to their member countries. The objective of the joint NEA/IAEA peer review is to examine whether the post-closure assessment of the WIPP is appropriate, technically sound and conforms with international standards and practice. The NEA will coordinate and manage the review.

The information being reviewed is included in the Compliance Certification Application for WIPP that the Carlsbad Area Office will submit to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in October 1996. The EPA criteria require the Carlsbad Area Office to demonstrate that the WIPP repository will isolate the wastes placed in it from the accessible environment for 10,000 years.

"While this review is not a requirement of our permit application, it will provide the EPA with additional confidence in the performance assessment conducted on the WIPP facility," said George Dials, manager of the Carlsbad Area Office.

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**Joint International Peer Review of WIPP's  
Long-Term Performance**

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"The WIPP project is a model for international geologic repository development. Through this peer review, it is possible to benefit from the experience of the world's leading experts in nuclear waste disposal and radiological safety assessments as we work to bring the WIPP on line as a critical step toward solving the nation's nuclear waste disposal problem," Dials said.

The WIPP is designed to permanently dispose of transuranic radioactive waste generated by defense-related activities. Located in southeastern New Mexico, 26 miles east of Carlsbad, project facilities include disposal rooms excavated in an ancient, stable salt formation 2,150 feet (almost half a mile) underground. Transuranic waste consists primarily of clothing, tools, rags, and other disposable items contaminated with trace amounts of radioactive elements, mostly plutonium.

For the purpose of the review, the agencies will appoint a group of independent international experts from fields such as geology, geochemistry, material sciences, radiation and environmental protection, and nuclear safety. The expert group will include representatives from nuclear regulatory bodies, radioactive waste management agencies, universities, and research institutions.

The review will begin in October 1996 and will cover a six-month period. It will be conducted on the basis of detailed documentation provided by the Carlsbad Area Office and discussions with the specialists involved with the WIPP project during a site visit. A report containing the international expert group's findings will be submitted to the Carlsbad Area Office.

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