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<http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us>**For Immediate Release****DOE's Carlsbad Area Office Stresses
Importance of Public Involvement**

CARLSBAD, N.M., August 14 -- The U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Carlsbad Area Office today released statistics highlighting its focus on public involvement in decisions regarding efforts to open the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) as the nation's first deep geologic repository for nuclear waste.

George Dials, Manager of the Carlsbad Area Office, said the public has had 128 separate opportunities to voice concerns and offer input to the WIPP program since December 1993, when the Carlsbad Area Office was created to administer the WIPP and National Transuranic Program.

"I am concerned about the perception that the public does not have adequate access to our decision making process," said Dials. "Public involvement is vital to our success, and the number of past and future opportunities for public comment is indicative of the emphasis the DOE places on listening to citizens."

Since December 1993, the Carlsbad Area Office has hosted or participated in public meetings in a variety of settings, including scoping meetings on the Second Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement being developed for the WIPP; regular quarterly meetings with oversight groups such as the New Mexico Environmental

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Evaluation Group; hearings conducted by WIPP regulators, the New Mexico Environment Department and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; meetings with leaders of communities impacted by the WIPP; and meetings with tribal governments.

In addition to the 128 public involvement opportunities held to date, there is a minimum of 53 such meetings and hearings scheduled between now and the WIPP's scheduled opening in April 1998. These opportunities will include hearings on the final Second Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, meetings sponsored by the state of New Mexico in communities impacted by WIPP shipments, formal hearings conducted by the New Mexico Environment Department on the WIPP's Resource Conservation and Recovery Act permit, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's hearings regarding the DOE's Compliance Certification Application.

"We encourage public involvement every step of the way as we get closer to bringing the WIPP into operation," said Dials. "We take public input very seriously, and we go to great lengths to respond to all comments and concerns."

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.

The National Transuranic Program administers nationwide generation/storage site programs for characterizing, transporting, packaging, storing, and disposing of transuranic waste. Defense-generated transuranic waste is temporarily stored at more than 30 small and large sites nationwide.

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