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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **WIPP Permit Compliance Would Cost Taxpayers Additional \$33 Million**

*Richardson Frustrated by Added Burden*

Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson today expressed significant concerns over the hazardous waste permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) near Carlsbad, New Mexico. The Permit, which was issued last week by the Secretary of the New Mexico Environment Department, becomes effective on November 26, 1999.

"The hazardous waste permit places onerous requirements on the Department of Energy (DOE) that could lead to workers being unnecessarily exposed to radiation, additional delays and expenditures for DOE sites cleaning up the legacy of the Cold War and a further strain on existing resources. My hope is that Governor Johnson intervenes to fix these problems with the permit," said Secretary Richardson. "We plan to challenge provisions in the permit requiring additional waste characterization at DOE sites and financial assurances for eventual closure of the WIPP facility."

The DOE sites are projected to need up to \$33 million to comply with the characterization requirements of the permit and cleanup obligations, according to an Energy Department review. The two largest expenditures are estimated to be \$10 million for the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site in Colorado and \$8.8 million for the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory (INEEL).

Furthermore, the permit requires Westinghouse, DOE's lead contractor for WIPP, to provide \$100 million in financial assurances for the eventual closure of the facility. Federal legislation mandates these funds come from existing appropriations for state economic assistance. Before the end of this year DOE will reimburse Westinghouse up to \$20 million so that Westinghouse can provide these assurances and shipments of mixed waste can begin.

(MORE)

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"The Energy Department will move swiftly to ship and dispose of waste in order to comply with agreements and commitments made with several states," said Secretary Richardson. "We will aggressively ship from Rocky Flats to WIPP until the end of November and we will do what it takes to bring that site, and Hanford (Washington), into compliance with the permit to resume shipments early next year." Shipments from the INEEL (Idaho) are projected to resume next Spring, while shipments from Los Alamos in New Mexico and the Savannah River Site in South Carolina are not anticipated until later next year.

Secretary Richardson's comments came after the department's review concluded that compliance with the permit will force DOE to reallocate FY 2000 funds in order to resume waste shipments to WIPP in early 2000. Funds being reallocated include \$20.3 million that had been planned for economic assistance in New Mexico, and instead will be used to meet financial assurance requirements. In addition, additional costs of up to \$33 million to comply with characterization requirements and clean up obligations will be drawn from a number of sources, including \$8.3 million from Sandia National Laboratories, \$9 million from Westinghouse, and \$3.2 million from Los Alamos National Laboratory that was designated for technical studies that are not critical to current operations. Additional funding will be withdrawn from other WIPP projects that also are not critical at this time.

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