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Hanford Waste Shipment Departs For Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

A truck transporting transuranic radioactive waste from the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Hanford Site to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) near Carlsbad, N.M. left the DOE site at about 5 p.m. (Pacific Time) today. The 1,800-mile trip is expected to take about 45 hours.

The seven 55-gallon drums of waste are being transported in Nuclear Regulatory Commission-approved shipping containers. The shipment was approved for disposal by the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) under WIPP's Hazardous Waste Facility Permit. Additional Hanford waste (about 400 drums), readied for shipment prior to the issuance of the New Mexico permit, is being reevaluated to confirm it meets applicable regulatory requirements.

DOE's Carlsbad Office, which administers the National Transuranic Waste and WIPP programs, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency already have approved Hanford's waste characterization and shipping protocols.

The shipment will be transported to WIPP along a carefully planned transportation route, moving through seven western states (Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico). Preparations for shipments included extensive training of emergency response personnel along the transportation route. Hanford is the fourth Department site to ship waste to WIPP, and will send an estimated 2,500 shipments (about 80,000 drums) of transuranic waste over the next 30 years.

Once at the WIPP facility, the waste will be permanently disposed 2,150 feet (almost one-half mile) beneath the ground in a bedded-salt formation below New Mexico's Chihuahuan Desert.

Transuranic waste consists of clothing, tools, rags, debris, residues, and other disposable items contaminated with radioactive elements, mostly plutonium.

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