Los Alamos National Laboratory ships last of high-activity drums to WIPP

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LOS ALAMOS, New Mexico, November 25, 2008— The last group of unvented high-activity drums left Los Alamos National Laboratory for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) near Carlsbad earlier this month.

“This is a significant achievement for the Laboratory,” said Mark Shepard of Los Alamos’s Waste Disposition Project. “It closes a chapter on the February 2007 commitment to the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board to prioritize characterization and disposal of the highest-risk transuranic (TRU) wastes stored at Technical Area 54, Area G,” he said.

“We are proud of meeting our commitment to shipping these high activity drums to WIPP,” Los Alamos Site Office Manager Don Winchell said. “With this achievement we’ve made good on our commitment to the state and citizens of New Mexico.”

To date, 228 of the originally identified 325 parent drums have been moved to WIPP. Through repackaging operations, an additional 54 drums were generated resulting in a total of 282 high-activity drums shipped to WIPP as part of this campaign, Shepard said.

A high-activity drum contains greater than 56 plutonium-equivalent curies. Plutonium-equivalent curies is a standard measure used in risk analysis for transuranic waste operations.

“These drums, given their high-activity loadings and generally dispersible contents, are our highest concerns in credible accident scenarios at Area G,” said Shepard.

“The risk from Area G has been significantly lowered and that’s a benefit to the Laboratory and its neighbors,” said Michael Graham, Los Alamos’s associate director for environmental programs.

Through this effort, approximately 20 percent of the material at risk at Area G has been removed, Shepard added.

The November shipment was the final delivery this year to the Carlsbad plant, which is scheduled to undergo facility maintenance through mid-January.

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