Final remote-handled waste canister leaves Los Alamos National Laboratory

July 2, 2009

Sixteen canisters shipped in one month

Los Alamos, New Mexico, July 2, 2009 — Los Alamos National Laboratory officials today announced the safe departure of the Laboratory's 16th and final canister of "remote-handled" radioactive waste destined for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) near Carlsbad, New Mexico.

The Laboratory began shipping the canisters exactly one month ago and averaged four shipments per week.

"We completed the job on time and safely," said Michael Graham, LANL associate director for environmental programs. "The shipment is a key milestone toward achieving our cleanup responsibilities."

WIPP will dispose of the canisters in rooms mined from a salt formation deep underground. Open since 1999, WIPP is the nation's only repository for transuranic radioactive waste.

The 16 canisters had been stored at the Laboratory in vertical, concrete shafts since 1995. The canisters each contain three 55-gallon drums filled with rags, tools, plastics, glassware, and other equipment used in enclosures known as "hot cells" at the Laboratory's Chemical and Metallurgy Research building in the 1970s and 1980s.

Prior to shipping, workers loaded each canister into a sturdy, lead-lined shipping cask. The shipments occurred during off-peak traffic hours and followed preapproved transportation routes.

WIPP has conducted more than 7,200 shipments of transuranic waste, including more than 200 shipments of remote-handled waste from other Department of Energy sites.

The milestone shipment is part of ongoing efforts to close the Laboratory's Material Disposal Area G by 2015, as required in the Order on Consent—an agreement between the Los Alamos National Security, DOE, and the New Mexico Environment Department.

EDITORS: Photos and b-roll are available upon request.

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