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Immediate Release

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**Environment Department Issues Draft Permit Modification for DOE's  
Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, Seeks Public Comment**

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) released today for public comment and review a draft permit incorporating modifications to the existing Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) near Carlsbad.

"Above all, this proposed draft permit protects human health and the environment," NMED Secretary Ron Curry said. "Last year, with Governor Richardson's strong support, we blocked the disposal of any high-level sludge at WIPP. Now, with this permit modification, we are looking to ensure DOE continues to keep its promises to New Mexicans on transuranic waste shipments to WIPP."

A draft of NMED's proposed permit modification and a detailed fact sheet are available online at [www.nmenv.state.nm.us/wipp](http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/wipp).

In the permit modifications submitted to NMED, DOE sought to include the disposal of remote-handled transuranic (TRU) mixed wastes; change the TRU mixed waste characterization process and the waste confirmation procedures, as mandated by Congress; increase the TRU mixed waste storage capacity; and follow an alternative method for demonstrating that underground disposal rooms at WIPP comply with environmental performance standards for volatile organic compounds.

NMED's draft permit, released today for public comment, proposes to approve many aspects of these modifications to WIPP's Hazardous Waste Facility Permit, according to DOE's request.

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DOE also requested NMED allow waste confirmation activities be conducted at the WIPP facility. NMED's draft permit proposes to deny this portion of the permit modification request. If confirmation occurs at WIPP rather than at generator facilities, it is possible WIPP could end up with materials prohibited for disposal and prohibited by federal law for shipment back to generator sites.

"DOE did not demonstrate that New Mexicans would be protected if prohibited waste were to reach WIPP," Cindy Padilla, NMED's Water and Waste Management Division Director said. "Until DOE can provide assurances that any waste with prohibited materials in it can be sent back to generator sites, or be safely treated to remove the items at WIPP, we can't approve this portion of their plan."

"Prohibited items" include such things as pressurized containers and liquids. WIPP's Permit prohibits disposal of these items in order to protect workers and the environment.

The 60-day public comment period begins November 23, 2005 and ends January 23, 2006. Comments or requests for a public hearing should include the individual's name and address and should be sent to James P. Bearzi, NMED Hazardous Waste Bureau, 2905 Rodeo Park Drive East, Building 1, Santa Fe, NM, 87505; faxed to (505) 428-2567; or e-mailed to [james.bearzi@state.nm.us](mailto:james.bearzi@state.nm.us). If a permit hearing is requested and granted, a tentative date has been set for March 8, 2006.

For further information, contact Adam Rankin, NMED Communications Director, at (505) 827-0314.

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