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Mine Officials Recognize WIPP Safety

CARLSBAD, N.M., May 9, 2006 – A statewide campaign to promote workplace safety brought federal and state mining officials to southeast New Mexico and the U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). Rebecca Boam, New Mexico State mine inspector, and Eddie Lopez, district manager for the South Central Region of the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), combined efforts to reach out to New Mexico’s miners and operators.

“We will do whatever it takes to ensure that people go home safely every day,” said Boam. The two toured Carlsbad’s Intrepid and Mosaic potash mines last week, concluding their swing through southeast New Mexico with a stop 2,150 feet below ground at WIPP.

Lopez, whose district covers underground metal/nonmetal mines in a six-state region, commended WIPP miners on their safety record, noting that WIPP has the distinction of being the only underground mine in the country that qualifies as a Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) “Star” site. The DOE established the VPP program to recognize its contractors for outstanding safety performance. Washington TRU Solutions is the management and operating contractor for DOE at WIPP.

“The mines in this region conduct business 365 days a year, 99.9% of the time without an injury. I believe we can achieve zero (injuries),” said Lopez. According to MSHA records there have been nine fatalities in metal/nonmetal mines this year. Lopez challenged the miners to remember and learn from the accidents.

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The officials presented a certificate of appreciation to the WIPP facility and employees for working together with MSHA and state government to promote workplace safety and going “above and beyond.”

Washington TRU Solutions employee Kevin McIlwee accepted the certificate on behalf of WIPP. “I can tell you WIPP is a safe place to work. We’ll display it with pride,” he said to the applause of fellow miners.

WTS has managed WIPP for the U.S. Department of Energy for more than 20 years. WTS opened and has safely operated WIPP, the nation’s first permanent geologic repository for defense nuclear waste since 1999. Washington Group International, headquartered in Boise, Idaho, is the parent company of WTS.