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Scientists From Nine Countries to Converge On Carlsbad for Technical Meeting

CARLSBAD, N.M., February 7, 2000 – Scientists from nine countries will converge on this southeastern New Mexico city February 7-10 to share their views during the 13th Äspö Hard Rock Laboratory Task Force Meeting on Modelling of Groundwater Flow and Transport of Solutes.

"Carlsbad is quickly becoming recognized as the international center for repository technology," said Dr. Inés Triay, manager of the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Carlsbad Area Office. "Since the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) is the world's first deep-geologic repository for transuranic waste disposal, this is the perfect location to conduct a meeting of this type."

Meetings will be held at the Holiday Inn, 601 S. Canal St., Carlsbad. The opening session for the task force meeting is scheduled for 8:30 a.m. (MST) February 8. Meetings will continue through 1 p.m. (MST) February 9. The group will then break to tour the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). Meetings will resume February 10, with a final session set for noon February 11.

The Äspö Hard Rock Laboratory, located in Sweden, is studying how bedrock will function as a barrier to prevent the release of radioactive materials into the environment. Of particular interest to the laboratory are the movement of groundwater and the chemical structure of the bedrock.

Laboratory scientists are also studying how copper waste canisters will interact with bedrock during actual waste emplacement. This research will help scientists estimate the life span of waste canisters, the effect – if any – on spent nuclear fuel, and how radionuclides will move if groundwater is present. Six sites are under consideration for permanent repositories in Sweden.

The Äspö Modelling Task Force is a forum of international organizations supporting the Äspö Hard Rock Laboratory. The task force, meeting for the first time in the United States, supports experiments in studying the movement of radionuclides in crystalline rock. The data, along with additional geotechnical information, will be used to support the licensing of a permanent nuclear waste repository in Sweden.

DOE and Sandia National Laboratories are jointly sponsoring the event, which will include scientists from Finland, France, Japan, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

"Carlsbad is the ideal place for a meeting of this kind," said Ned Elkins, Manager of the Sandia Carlsbad Operations Office. "By working with other countries, we are able to build relationships and conduct research in an international setting."

A cornerstone of the DOE's cleanup effort, the WIPP is designed to permanently dispose of transuranic radioactive waste left from the research and production of nuclear weapons.

Located in southeastern New Mexico, 26 miles east of Carlsbad, project facilities include disposal rooms excavated in an ancient, stable salt formation 2,150 feet underground.

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

For more information about WIPP, call 1-800-336-9477, or visit our Web site at http://www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us.

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