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NEWS MEDIA CONTACT:
Craig Stevens, 202/586-4940

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OCRWM Selects Sandia as Lead Laboratory

Also reserves building at Idaho National Laboratory as future training facility

WASHINGTON, DC - The Department of Energy's Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management (OCRWM) has announced it will designate Sandia National Laboratories as its lead laboratory to integrate repository science work for the Yucca Mountain Project. That work, which is currently overseen by OCRWM's contractor Bechtel SAIC, will be led by Sandia once the transition of responsibilities is completed.

"We believe that establishing Sandia as our lead laboratory is an important step in our new path forward. The independent, expert review that the scientists at Sandia will perform will help ensure that the technical and scientific basis for the Yucca Mountain repository is without question," OCRWM's Acting Director Paul Golan said. "Sandia has unique experience in managing scientific investigations in support of a federally licensed geologic disposal facility, having served in that role as the scientific advisor to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in Carlsbad, New Mexico."

The plan to designate Sandia as the lead laboratory builds on DOE's successful experience at WIPP, where a single national laboratory coordinated "post-closure" science work while a contractor performed work on the design of "pre-closure," or above ground facilities. Bechtel will continue to be responsible for above ground design efforts, while Sandia will concentrate on integrating all post-closure science. The move more clearly aligns responsibilities within the competencies of the project's participants and will more effectively leverage the capabilities of Sandia's experience with repository science issues.

Designating Sandia as the lead laboratory will provide OCRWM with strong, centralized leadership for its science program and will increase technical credibility with the scientific community, as well as the project's regulators and stakeholders. As OCRWM's lead laboratory, Sandia will provide management and integration services for all Yucca Mountain scientific programs necessary. These services will support OCRWM's license application and its defense in the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's review process, including the allocation of funding and the assignment of technical tasks to selected supporting organizations such as other national laboratories, subcontractors, federal agencies, universities, and expert panels.

In addition, Acting Director Golan announced that the department will transfer possession of Building TAN-607 at the Idaho National Laboratory (INL) from its Office of Environmental

Management to OCRWM. OCRWM plans to hold TAN-607 in reserve as a future training facility for Yucca Mountain workers. TAN-607 has many of the basic features and equipment that will eventually be used at Yucca Mountain. The facility will be used to train spent nuclear fuel handlers with non-radioactive material. INL had initially planned to begin dismantling TAN-607 starting this month.

TAN-607 was activated in 1954 with the capability to conduct research and development in high radiation fields. The 153,000 square-foot building has facilities to accommodate manufacturing and maintenance-type activities in large shops and high bays. TAN-607's "hot shop" is the largest shielded, remote handling facility in the United States with radio-controlled cranes and numerous remote manipulators. The transfer of the facility becomes effective March 1, 2006.

Today's announcements follow the October 25 announcement that OCRWM had instructed Bechtel to devise a plan to operate Yucca Mountain as a primarily "clean" or non-contaminated canister-handling facility. Switching to a clean-canistered design simplifies the project and frees it from having to construct several large facilities for the repeated handling of bare spent fuel.

"Our goal with announcing the switch to a clean-canistered design and with making Sandia our lead laboratory is to focus on simpler, safer, and more reliable operations," Acting Director Golan said. "The project needs to provide a solid, fully defensible technical basis to the NRC, and designating Sandia our lead laboratory means our science work will be properly integrated by the nation's very best in repository science."

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