



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF **ENERGY**

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For Immediate Release

WIPP Mine Rescue Team Wins Best Overall at Competition

CARLSBAD, N.M., June 1, 2009 – Members of the U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) Blue Mine Rescue Team recently brought home top honors from the Southern Regional Mine Rescue Competition. The event, held in New Iberia, La., boasted 12 teams from Missouri, Texas, Wyoming, Nevada, New Mexico and Louisiana.

The WIPP team won Best Overall Team, by scoring first-place victories in three of the competition’s four contests.

The team, led by Team Captain Gary Kessler, placed first in the Field Contest, which simulates an underground mine in an open field. An exercise scenario challenges participants with conditions that could be encountered in an underground mine emergency, including gases, fires or mine instability. The teams are evaluated as they move through the obstacle course to locate, treat and move staged victims to the surface. Officials from the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) judge each team’s response skills.

Joe Baca won first place in the Benchman’s Contest. The benchman’s job on a mine rescue team is to maintain and troubleshoot self-contained breathing apparatus. The

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breathing apparatus is worn by all team members that go underground to protect them from toxic gases until they return to clean air.

The team's third win was in the First Aid Contest. The three-person team of Nadine Kuhn, Ben Zimmerly and Jim Pearce took first place by demonstrating their ability to provide medical treatment to victims at the First Responder level of care.

The overall results are also dependent on a written examination, which is based on MSHA training modules. All team members take the exam, covering surface organization, mine gases, mine ventilation, exploration, fires, firefighting and explosions, rescue of survivors and mine recovery.

"We're very proud of the Blue Team's accomplishments in Louisiana," said Carlsbad Field Office Deputy Manager Vernon Daub. "Mine safety is critical to our project and to the mining industry. Participation in competitions is just one way that we and all participants continue to improve skills and prepare for the important task of saving lives."

WIPP has two mine rescue teams and has mutual aid agreements with Potash mines in the surrounding area.

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant is a U.S. Department of Energy facility designed to safely isolate defense-related transuranic waste from people and the environment. Waste temporarily stored at sites around the country is shipped to WIPP and permanently disposed in rooms mined out of an ancient salt formation 2,150 feet below the surface. WIPP, which began waste disposal operations in 1999, is located 26 miles outside of Carlsbad, N.M.