

## What is transuranic waste?

By John German

Transuranic (TRU) waste includes a variety of materials contaminated with radioactivity during production, dismantlement, and laboratory operations in the nuclear weapons complex -- protective clothing, wipe rags, scrap tools, laboratory equipment, and used machine parts, for example. The US now has more than 58,000 cubic meters of low-level waste packed primarily in 55-gallon drums. WIPP can accommodate 120,000 cubic meters (or about 850,000 drums). The waste comes mainly from DOE "generator" sites in Idaho, Colorado, New Mexico, California, Illinois, South Carolina, Tennessee, Washington, Ohio, and Nevada. So far only Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory, the Rocky Flats site, and Los Alamos National Laboratory are certified to characterize, certify, and ship transuranic waste to WIPP. The small amount of Sandia-generated waste will be shipped to Los Alamos for processing. Less than four percent of the DOE transuranic waste inventory is so radioactive it must be handled remotely (called remote-handled, or RH, waste), though all of WIPP's waste will be handled cautiously to keep worker exposures as low as possible.