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**STATE ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT ALERTS DOÑA ANA COUNTY
RESIDENTS OF RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH DUST STORMS**

(Santa Fe, NM) – The New Mexico Environment Department, along with the City of Las Cruces and Doña Ana County, is advising the citizens of Doña Ana County of the potential risks associated with dust storms that often occur during this time of the year.

A combination of weather conditions, features of the natural environment, and human activity can contribute to high levels of wind blown dust, or dust storms. High winds can raise large amounts of dust from areas of dry, loose, exposed soil. In the Doña Ana County area, high winds are most common during the spring.

Doña Ana County typically experiences one to ten days a year when dust storms exceed the National Ambient Air Quality Standard of airborne particulate matter 10 microns or less in size, which is about 1/7 the diameter of a human hair. This standard was developed to protect the public's health and well being.

The Environment Department realizes that although dust storms are common in this part of New Mexico and are inherent to arid climates, inhaling dust can cause a number of serious health problems and can make some health problems worse. It can irritate the lungs and trigger allergic reactions, as well as asthma attacks. For people who already suffer from these conditions, dust can cause serious breathing problems. Dust can also cause coughing, wheezing and runny noses. Breathing large amounts of dust for prolonged periods can result in chronic breathing and lung problems.

Breathing too much dust can potentially harm anyone. However, the following groups run the highest risk of being adversely affected by a dust storm:

- Infants, children, and teens,
- The elderly,
- People with respiratory conditions like asthma, bronchitis, COPD and emphysema,
- People with heart or lung disease, and
- Pregnant women.

The best precaution to take during a dust storm is simply to avoid going outside. If you must go outside, spend as little time outside as possible, avoid hard exercise and wear some type of covering over the nose and mouth to provide protection from larger dust particles.

For more information on the risks associated with dust storms please see the NMED's website at www.nmenv.state.nm.us/aqb or contact the NMED at 1-800-224-7009.

For more information, please contact Jim Winchester, NMED Communications Director at (505) 231-8800 or Michael Baca, Environmental Analyst, NMED Air Quality Bureau at (575) 524-6300.

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