



SUSANA MARTINEZ
Governor
JOHN A. SANCHEZ
Lieutenant Governor

State of New Mexico
ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT
Office of the Secretary

Harold Runnels Building
1190 Saint Francis Drive, PO Box 5469
Santa Fe, NM 87502-5469
Telephone (505) 827-2855 Fax (505) 827-2836
www.nmenv.state.nm.us



DAVE MARTIN
Secretary
BUTCH TONGATE
Deputy Secretary

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Contact: Jim Winchester
Communications Director
Phone: (505) 231-8800

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

(Santa Fe, NM) – The New Mexico Environment Department, along with the City of Deming and Luna County, is advising the citizens of Luna 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 windblown dust, or dust storms. High winds can raise large amounts of dust from areas of dry, loose, exposed soil. In the Luna County area, high winds are most common during the spring.

Luna County typically experiences five to ten days a year when dust storms cause exceedances of the National Ambient Air Quality Standard for 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 wellbeing.

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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