

**SUSANA MARTINEZ, GOVERNOR**Ryan Flynn, *Cabinet Secretary-Designate*Butch Tongate, *Deputy Secretary***NEWS RELEASE****April 30, 2013**

Contact: Jim Winchester
Communications Director
New Mexico Environment Department
(505)231-8800 / jim.winchester@state.nm.us

**STATE ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT ALERTS NEW MEXICO
RESIDENTS OF RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH DUST STORMS**

(Santa Fe, NM) – The New Mexico Environment Department, in consultation with the National Weather Service, expects high wind conditions for portions of the state on Tuesday and especially Wednesday and Wednesday night as a strong late season cold front sweeps the state from north to south. The strong winds could cause dust storms, particularly in the northwestern region of the state as well as on the eastern plains. Strong east canyon winds along the middle and lower Rio Grande Valley Wednesday night into Thursday may result in dust impacts, as well. Dust storms result in elevated levels of airborne particulate matter 10 microns or less in size, which is about 1/7 the diameter of a human hair.

Due to the current drought and very dry soil conditions, there is more potential for blowing dust than usual for the entire state even in lower wind conditions.

The Environment Department realizes that although dust storms are common in 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 <http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/aqb/NEAP/>.

For more information, please contact Jim Winchester, NMED Communications Director at (505) 231-8800 or Rita Bates, Environmental Analyst, NMED Air Quality Bureau at (505) 476-4304 or toll free at (800) 224-7009.

###