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July 12, 2006
Immediate Release

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Environment Department Issues Compliance Order and \$44,500 Civil Penalty to Alta Vista Regional Hospital

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) issued a Compliance Order on July 10, 2006, to Community Health Systems Professional Services Corp., which manages the Alta Vista Regional Hospital in Las Vegas. The Order assesses a civil penalty of \$44,500 for the unlawful disposal of infectious waste at the Northeastern New Mexico Regional Landfill (NENMRL) near Wagon Mound.

The infectious waste was discovered during an un-announced, two-day inspection of the NENMRL on April 18 and 19, 2006, which included the inspection of every truck load of waste arriving at the landfill. Three trucks loads of solid waste arriving from the Las Vegas Transfer Station were found to contain infectious waste generated by the Alta Vista Regional Hospital.

“Generators of hazardous and infectious wastes must be held accountable for the proper management and disposal of their byproducts and wastes in order to protect New Mexico’s water quality and public health,” NMED Secretary Ron Curry said. “These un-announced inspections serve as an important deterrent for both waste generators and landfills and ensure that they follow state laws and their permit requirements.”

The illegal waste included a sharp, uncapped syringe with attached needle, gloves, pipettes, drapes, gauze, pillows, accumulation bags, suction containers, and plastic tubing that contained or was contaminated with blood or bloody liquid. The infectious waste was discovered inside one or more layers of black plastic bags, some of which contained red bio-hazard bags holding the medical waste. Infectious waste is considered a special waste under the New Mexico Solid Waste Management Regulations and is specifically prohibited from New Mexico landfills. Such waste has unique handling, transportation, treatment and disposal requirements, as it carries the risk of transmitting disease, such as HIV/AIDS or hepatitis, to humans.

Community Health Systems/Alta Vista Regional Hospital has 30 days to respond to the Order and may request a public hearing.

For more information, contact Adam Rankin, NMED Communications Director, at (505) 827-0314.

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