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State Environment Department Reacts to Lowered Arsenic Standard

(Santa Fe, NM) – In light of Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) recent decision on the drinking water standard for arsenic, the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) is committed to helping counties and municipalities develop plans for meeting the new standard of 10 parts per billion (ppb).

“Since the old standard had been 50 parts per billion, meeting the new standard of 10 will present economic and technical challenges for effected water systems,” said Environment Secretary Peter Maggiore. “The new standard may be costly for many New Mexico communities but it was established to better protect public health.”

The EPA initially published the new standard of 10 ppb for arsenic in drinking water In January 2001. However, the agency withheld making a final decision to further analyze studies on the effects of arsenic in drinking water. “We appreciate the extra lengths that the EPA went to in assessing the health effects of arsenic at 10 ppb, versus other levels,” said Maggiore. “All along, our concern has been that the arsenic standard be set at a level that was warranted by scientific findings.”

Three reports and recommendations were recently concluded that support lowering the Arsenic standard of 50 ppb. The studies were prepared by independent, expert panels convened by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), the National Drinking Water Advisory Council (NDWAC), and the EPA Science Advisory Board (SAB).

Meeting the order's lower arsenic standards will cost New Mexico's citizens an estimated \$370 million to \$440 million in initial capital to upgrade drinking water treatment systems, and then around \$18 million a year more to operate – that averages out to an increase of about \$40 on the monthly water bill for large-system customers, and \$91 a month for customers of small water systems.

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