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### **State Agencies Convene Environmental Justice Task Force; Take First Steps Toward Process to Address EJ Concerns**

(Santa Fe, NM) — Representatives from nine state agencies gathered on March 30 at the Roundhouse in Santa Fe for the first meeting of the New Mexico Inter-Agency Environmental Justice Task Force, created by Governor Richardson's Environmental Justice Executive Order that was signed in Las Cruces in November.

"This is a historic occasion because for the first time today we have multiple state agencies coming together to establish a process for addressing environmental justice issues across the state," NMED Secretary Curry said. "Starting today we begin the work of developing a comprehensive approach for all state agencies, boards and even commissions to combat environmental injustice. New Mexico has an opportunity to really stand out and develop an environmental justice program that is a model for other states."

The Task Force will create a mechanism for state agencies, boards and commissions to address environmental justice concerns raised by communities. Part of that effort will include developing a process for state entities to foster early and meaningful public and community participation, improving notification of proposals and solicitations for public input, and translation of notices and documents into Spanish and native languages, as appropriate. The Task Force is required to submit a report on its accomplishments at the end of each year to Governor Richardson.

The Task Force is comprised of representatives from the State Engineer's Office, Department of Agriculture, Department of Health, Department of Transportation, the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, the Department of Public Safety, Department of Labor and the Department of Education.

Secretary Curry extended Task Force membership to NMED's Environmental Justice Policy Committee members: Regina Romero, Deputy Director of the New Mexico Municipal League; Richard Moore, Executive Director of the Southwest Network for Economic and Environmental Justice; Douglas Meiklejohn, Executive Director of the New Mexico Environmental Law Center; Pablo Padilla, a tribal representative; Jim O'Neill, the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce; and Marla Shoats, an industry representative.

The first meeting focused on introductions and a review of the history of environmental justice issues across the nation and within New Mexico, as well as challenges the Task Force will face.

The next Task Force meetings, which have yet to be scheduled, will be held in May and June. For the May meeting, each agency representative will review Governor Richardson's Environmental Justice Executive Order to determine how it applies within to their agency's policies and regulations, and will also review environmental justice policies that are already in place to report back to the Task Force.

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

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