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Immediate Release

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State Environmental Justice Task Force to Hold First Meeting March 30

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environmental Justice Task Force, comprised of representatives from nine cabinet-level state agencies, will be holding its kick-off meeting March 30 at the Capitol Building, room 311, in Santa Fe from 10 a.m. to noon. The public will have an opportunity to comment at the end of the meeting.

Created by Governor Bill Richardson's Environmental Justice Executive Order, signed in November 2005, the Task Force is charged with making recommendations to state agencies on ways to address environmental justice issues and developing policies and procedures for communities to request the Task Force address environmental justice issues.

The Task Force will be made up 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. The New Mexico Environment Department will serve as the lead agency on the Task Force, which must report its accomplishments by December 31 of each year to Governor Richardson.

"It has taken years for the environmental justice movement to reach this historic point. It is to the credit of Governor Richardson that he has recognized the importance of requiring state agencies to address environmental justice issues," Secretary Curry said. "This Task Force will help make New Mexico a model for reducing environmental injustice. All people, regardless of race, ethnicity, income, or education level, should be treated fairly."

Jonathan Hook, the Director of Environmental Justice and Tribal Affairs for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region VI, will give a federal overview of environmental justice. Members of NMED's Environmental Justice Policy Committee, who helped form the Environmental Justice Executive Order, are also invited to attend. The Policy Committee includes members from industry, business and environmental and grassroots organizations.

Secretary Curry praised former Deputy Secretary Derrith Watchman-Moore, who resigned March 20 to seek election to the Public Regulatory Committee, for her work as chairwoman of the Policy Committee and for elevating environmental justice issues. Cindy Padilla, director of NMED's Water and Waste Management Division, is serving as Acting Deputy Secretary.

"Derrith will be missed, but I know that Cindy, who was instrumental in the Department's 2004 environmental justice listening sessions, will work tirelessly to move environmental justice issues forward in the state," Secretary Curry said.

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

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