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Environment Department advises El Rito Canyon MDWCA to lift “BOIL WATER ORDER”

(Santa Fe, NM) –The New Mexico Environment Department’s (NMED) Drinking Water Bureau has advised the El Rito Canyon Mutual Domestic Water Consumers Association (MDWCA) that it is now safe to lift a “boil water order” for their water system.

The El Rito Canyon water system is located in Rio Arriba County, approximately 3 miles northwest of the main village of El Rito on New Mexico State Road 110. The water system was put on a Boil Water Order on Wednesday, February 25, 2004 due to bacteriological contamination that resulted in an exceedence of the Maximum Contaminant Level for Total Coliforms and *E. coli* bacteria.

A final round of seven water samples were collected on Monday, March 1, 2003 and test results showed no Total Coliforms or *E. coli* bacteria in the community water system. As a result of these findings, the NMED-DWB, in collaboration with the DOH Office of Epidemiology, determined that it is safe to lift the “boil water order”.

Since the problem was identified, troubleshooting efforts completed by NMED technical staff have identified possible sources of contamination and maximum efforts have been made to disinfect and flush the entire water system.

Efforts are currently underway to have consumers properly fix isolated incidents of improper line repair work. Additional efforts are being made by the community water system to eliminate any high-risk possible cross-connections between private wells and the system. Repairs, including a new water storage tank and distribution, are also planned for the water system. This is part of an ongoing effort to support a regionalization master plan linking several water systems in the immediate El Rito area. All of these improvements should lead to better water quality for the community.

The presence of *E. coli* in water indicates that the water may have been in contact with sewage or animal wastes, and could contain disease-causing organisms. Most strains of *E. coli* are harmless and live in the intestines of healthy humans and animals. However, a positive test for *E. coli* in the drinking water supply may indicate the presence of dangerous strains of *E. coli*. These types of organisms may cause severe gastrointestinal illness and, in rare cases, even death. Children, the elderly, and immuno-compromised individuals are at an increased risk for illness.

The New Mexico Department of Health will remain on alert for any health effects linked to this water quality issue. Consumers of the water system may call (505) 841-5894, if they have any health related concerns.

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