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Environment Department to Provide Funding to Train Water System Operators in Rural Communities

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) is working to meet a statewide need for certified drinking water system operators in small, rural communities by providing funding for expenses associated with training required under state and federal regulations. Regulations require public drinking water systems have a certified operator who is trained in the proper operation and maintenance of drinking water systems.

Statewide drinking water statistics clearly demonstrate the rural nature of the state's public drinking water systems. New Mexico has about 1,280 public water systems statewide, more than 95 percent of which serve fewer than 500 consumers. Due to large travel distances, low population densities and economic barriers, many small, rural public water systems have in the past had difficulties hiring certified operators.

Through a one-time federal Expense Reimbursement Grant (ERG) program, administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Department is now offering training for public water systems that serve fewer than 3,300 consumers. Approximately 737 water systems are eligible for the ERG training program: 588 community and 149 non-transient, non-community drinking water systems. This program will provide certification training of the following operator class levels: Small System, Small System Advanced, Class I, and Class II. The EPA grant totals \$1.4 million, and the program ends January 1, 2008.

“This grant will increase the number of certified public water system operators in the smallest rural communities to help them meet state and federal compliance requirements and assure a safe drinking water supply for New Mexico,” NMED Secretary Ron Curry said. “I encourage all public water systems to inquire about this free training.”

The Expense Reimbursement Grant training is being provided statewide through a contract with the New Mexico Rural Water Association. Under the grant program, eligible participants may receive training at no charge and reimbursement for travel-related expenses.

Information on the grant program and training schedule is available online at www.nmrwa.org/training.php or by calling 800-819-9893. For information on operator certification requirements visit and information on how to apply visit www.nmenv.state.us/swqb/FOR/index.html or call Retta Prophet with NMED's Drinking Water Bureau at (505) 827-1400. For press inquiries, contact Adam Rankin, NMED Communications Director, at (505) 827-0314.

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