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**Environment Department to Teach San Juan County Students About Air  
Pollution With EPA Grant**

(Santa Fe, NM) – *Question: Why is ozone good in the upper atmosphere but bad down here?*  
(Read on for the answer.)

This is the sort of question that the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) will seek to tackle with a new effort to educate San Juan County students about the dangers of ozone air pollution. This work was made possible by a recent \$10,000 grant from the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

“Educating children about the dangers of ozone pollution makes sense,” said NMED Secretary Ron Curry. “Ozone has been shown to cause asthma, an illness that has an especially strong impact on kids. This education effort will help students, and their parents, understand the dangers of ozone pollution and how NMED is working to alleviate the problem in San Juan County.”

For several consecutive years NMED has noted elevated ozone levels in the San Juan County area. The levels in San Juan County have approached federal air quality limits (the National Ambient Air Quality Standard) for ozone pollution. If ozone levels exceed the national standard public health and the environment would be adversely impacted. The area would also be subject to strict federal regulations to reduce pollution. These regulations could significantly affect economic growth in the area.

To proactively address the issue of ozone in San Juan County, NMED held a series of public meetings and facilitated the creation of the Early Action Compact, an agreement that allows governments in San Juan County and NMED’s Air Quality Bureau to work together on a study of the formation of ozone. The goal of the study is to determine what measures, if any, would help maintain and/or lower ozone levels in San Juan County before the national standard is exceeded.

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San Juan County, the Cities of Aztec, Bloomfield, and Farmington, NMED, and the EPA signed the Early Action Compact in December 2002.

The education grant awarded by the EPA will further aid in providing the citizens of San Juan County with needed information on the risks associated with high levels of ozone. The grant funding will be used to develop an activity book for grade school students and an ozone fact sheet for teachers to encourage lesson plans about ozone pollution.

For more information, please contact Mary Uhl, Manager of the Air Quality Bureau's Planning and Policy Section, at (505) 955-8086 or Jon Goldstein, NMED Communications Director at (505) 827-0314.

*Answer: Ozone occurs in two layers of the atmosphere. The layer closest to the Earth's surface is the troposphere. Here, ground level or "bad" ozone is an air pollutant that is harmful to breathe and damages crops, trees and other vegetation. It is a main ingredient of urban smog. The troposphere generally extends to a level about six miles up, where it meets the second layer, the stratosphere. The stratospheric or "good" ozone layer extends upward from about 6 to 30 miles and protects life on Earth from the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays.*

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