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**OZONE LEVELS IN SAN JUAN COUNTY APPROACH FEDERAL
STANDARD VIOLATION**

(Santa Fe, NM) – The New Mexico Environment Department’s (NMED) air monitoring sites in San Juan County show that ozone levels during the summer months are approaching the federal national ambient air quality standards (NAAQS) for ozone. The NMED is planning to meet with area citizens April 23 to discuss the concern over ozone, and to devise a plan to stay within the federal standard.

During the year 2000, monitors west of Farmington near the PNM San Juan Generating Station and North of Bloomfield near the Bloomfield Gas Corridor showed 8-hour averaged concentrations of 0.079 ppm (parts per million) and 0.080 ppm respectively. These levels were the fourth-highest averaged concentrations observed, and are the standard for comparison with the nationally established maximum of 0.084 ppm. Without attention ozone levels could exceed the NAAQS ozone standard in the near future.

Violation of these standards could cause the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to designate the area as “non-attainment” for ozone. The EPA would then require the NMED Air Quality Bureau to submit a plan to control emission sources and bring the area back into attainment with the NAAQS. The plan would include air quality control measures that would affect both

businesses and individuals. Non-attainment status would have a significant economic impact for the area.

The NAAQS are concentrations of specific air pollutants above which the EPA has determined that serious public health and welfare consequences could occur. Although the standard for ozone has not been exceeded in the area, the ozone levels recorded by local monitors are unexpectedly high for a rural area. High concentrations of ozone are generally found in highly urbanized areas with large volumes of emissions from industrial sources and vehicles.

Ground level ozone is formed when pollution emitted by cars, power plants, industrial boilers, refineries, chemical plants and other sources react chemically in the presence of sunlight. Ozone levels are highest during the summer months. High concentrations of ground level ozone can cause respiratory distress and other health impacts at elevated levels.

Breathing too much ozone can potentially harm anyone. However, the following groups run the highest risk of potentially being adversely affected by ground level ozone.

- Infants, children, and teens
- People with asthma, bronchitis, emphysema, or other respiratory conditions
- People with unusual susceptibility to ozone
- Healthy adults working or exercising vigorously outdoors

Some voluntary steps citizens can take daily to help reduce ozone levels include:

- Combine trips (to work, school, the grocery store, or other places) because a warm engine doesn't pollute as much as a cold one
- Try not to idle car or boat engines for too long
- Be careful when filling a gas tank. Spilled gasoline pollutes the air
- Get regular engine tune-ups
- Keep the right amount of air in vehicle tires
- Ride a bike or walk to nearby activities instead of driving

The NMED will be hosting an open house / public forum on Ozone, April 23 at the San Juan Community College, Henderson Fine Arts Center (Room 9012) in Farmington from 5:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. The first hour will be an open house, with Air Quality Bureau staff available to answer questions, followed by a presentation by Mr. Ralph Gruebel, New Mexico Environmental Protection Division Director. The evening will conclude with a public forum for citizens to discuss community air quality concerns.

For more information on the risks associated with high ozone levels or the upcoming meeting, please see the NMED website at www.nmenv.state.nm.us/aqb/aqb_home.html, click on “Ambient Ozone Measurements in San Juan County,” or contact Mary Uhl, Planning and Policy Section Manager at (505) 955-8086.

For more information, contact Mary Uhl, Planning & Policy Sec. Mgr., Air Quality Bureau, NMED at (505) 955-8086, or Cathy Tyson, Communications Director, NMED, at (505) 827-2855.

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