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Environment Department Issues Compliance Order and Proposed Penalties to El Paso Electric Co. for Air Quality Violations at Rio Grande Station near Sunland Park

(Santa Fe, NM) –The New Mexico Environment Department issued a compliance order this week to El Paso Electric Co. of Texas for air quality violations at its Rio Grande electric power generating station in Dona Ana County.

The Compliance Order, which NMED issued Wednesday, Sept. 27 for violations under the Air Quality Act, alleges approximately 650 violations of the maximum emission rates for sulfur dioxide (SO₂), oxides of nitrogen (NO_x), and carbon monoxide (CO) at the power plant during the past five years.

“Air quality permits are designed to protect the health of New Mexicans,” said New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry. “Carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides are harmful to human health. They can also react with other chemicals in the atmosphere to form greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming. Companies like El Paso Electric have a responsibility to help us protect New Mexicans from harmful pollution.”

Three boilers at the electric plant, which are gas fired, emit pollutants into the air during the process of electric generation.

NMED inspectors visited the plant Sept. 27, 2005 and obtained copies of records documenting emission rates at the plant. NMED reviewed thousands of pages of documents over several months and discovered the violations, which the company was required to report immediately under its permit.

The order also alleges El Paso Electric failed to report deviations from maximum emission rates and violated self reporting requirements in the permit.

The company may request a hearing with NMED for the violations and enter into settlement discussions. The order alleges that El Paso Electric is liable for a civil penalty of up to \$15,000 per day for each violation.

For more information, call NMED Communications Director Marissa Stone at (505) 827-0314 or (505) 231-0475.

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