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Contact: Marissa Stone Bardino, NMED Communications Director (505) 827-0314

NMED, City of Santa Fe, Santa Fe County, LANL to Offer Free Private Water Well Testing for Santa Fe Area Residents

Residents Urged to Obtain Free Water Wells Tests to Detect Possible Nitrate, Arsenic and Uranium Contamination

(Santa Fe, N.M.) The New Mexico Environment Department, the City of Santa Fe, Santa Fe County, Los Alamos National Laboratory, Sandia National Laboratories and the Good Water Company will offer free testing of private domestic water wells in the Santa Fe area. The department asked the other entities for their collaboration in providing free tests when it discovered previously unknown or higher than normal levels of contamination of arsenic, nitrate, radium, uranium in well water the area.

The department advises that those served by private domestic wells obtain those tests to determine the quality of their water. Residents, through the tests, will receive lab testing services from Los Alamos National Laboratory that would cost about \$1,000 at other state-of-the art labs.

“We encourage private domestic well owners to take advantage of this free testing that is far more advanced than results residents would obtain at a typical water fair,” said New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry. “Most wells in the area probably have good quality water but because of the ongoing drought and mining of the aquifer, we want to know if natural contaminants like arsenic, selenium, uranium, radium and fluoride are becoming more concentrated.”

Recent well water testing revealed previously unknown natural uranium contamination in the foothills area; nitrate concentrations along the Santa Fe River three times higher than past testing; radium concentrations in Glorieta not discovered in the past; and an upwelling of naturally occurring arsenic in the northwest part of the city. Fractured bedrock areas in the area’s mountain foothills are vulnerable to septic tank pollution, including nitrate and water softener salt. However, nitrate concentrations appear to be limited. Although it appears most well water in the region is of good quality, the department recommends that residents obtain the tests.

WHERE: The testing area includes the City of Santa Fe, north to Tesuque, east to Canoncito and Glorieta, south to Lamy, Eldorado and La Cienega, and west to the Rio Grande. Tests will include field and laboratory analyses for approximately 50 chemical parameters, including nitrate, fluoride, heavy metals including uranium, and organic vapor such as from gasoline and degreasing solvent.

WHEN: Field tests will be conducted June 23, 24 and 25. Well owners in Santa Fe and Santa Fe County can call the department to arrange for field test at residents’ wells.

CONTACT: Those who want have their water tested should contact Jessica Tapia at jessica.tapia@state.nm.us or (505) 476-8602. Residents who will not be home on the days of the testing may authorize the collection of a water sample from an outside faucet and the determination of wellhead coordinates with a Global Positioning System unit.

The department will take field measurements, water samples and note the position of domestic wells for mapping. Los Alamos National Laboratory, which will conduct the testing, will receive bottles, marked with numbers that do not identify residents, their addresses or well locations. The joint testing effort will enhance the ability of each collaborating organization to assess and map groundwater quality in the region and to provide information to residents about water quality. Names of well owners, addresses and phone number will remain confidential and will not be noted on maps. Participation is voluntary. NMED water quality experts will provide residents with test results and will be available to answer any questions. NMED also will be the gatekeeper of test data and will not release personal information including names, addresses, and phone numbers of well owners to the general public.

“We want to define the chemistry of the groundwater resource in this area so we can understand the geologic and human processes that influence the quality of the aquifer,” said NMED’s Environmental Health Division Director Carlos Romero. “We also want to advise residents about contamination problems in certain areas and provide them with a free test of their well water,”

LANL and SNL are involved in the project through the New Mexico Small Business Assistance program.

Water supplied by public drinking water systems will not be tested as those supplies are routinely analyzed pursuant to the Federal Safe Drinking Water Act. Those served by public systems should receive a Consumer Confidence Report each year from the system operator that summarizes water test results. For additional information on public drinking water systems, visit www.safewater.state.nm.us to review NMED’s online database of public drinking water systems.

For additional information, contact Dennis McQuillan, NMED, Environmental Health Manager, at (505) 476-8607; Robert Gallegos, City of Santa Fe, Environmental Protection Specialist, at (505) 955-4232; Karen Torres, Santa Fe County Hydrologist, at (505) 992-9871; or Patrick Longmire, LANL, Geochemist, at (505) 665-1264. For media inquiries, contact Marissa Stone Bardino, NMED Communications Director, at (505) 827-0314.

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