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**Environment Department Alerts Doña Ana County Residents of Risks Associated with
Dust Storms**

(Santa Fe, NM) – The New Mexico Environment Department -- along with the City of Las Cruces and Doña Ana County -- is advising the citizens of Doña Ana County of the potential health risks associated with dust storms.

“Although dust storms are common in southern New Mexico and are inherent to arid climates, inhaling dust can cause a number of serious health problems and can worsen existing health conditions,” said Environmental Protection Division Director Jim Norton.

Inhaled dust can irritate the lungs and trigger allergic reactions and asthma attacks. Dust can cause serious respiratory problems for people who already suffer from allergies and asthma. Dust may also cause coughing, wheezing and runny noses. Breathing large amounts of dust for prolonged periods of time can result in chronic breathing and lung problems.

The best precaution to take during a dust storm is simply to avoid going outside. If you must go outside, spend as little time there as possible, avoid vigorous exercise and wear a covering over the nose and mouth to provide protection from larger dust particles.

Doña Ana County typically experiences one to 10 days a year when dust storms cause exceedances of the National Ambient Air Quality Standard for airborne particulate matter 10 microns or less in size, which is about one-seventh the diameter of a human hair. That standard was developed to protect the public’s health and well being.

A combination of weather conditions, features of the natural environment, and human activity can contribute to high levels of wind blown dust, or dust storms. High winds can raise large amounts of dust from areas of dry, loose, exposed soil. In the Doña Ana County area, high winds are most common during the spring.

Breathing too much dust is potentially harmful to anyone. However, the following groups run the highest risk of being adversely affected by a dust storm:

Infants, children, teens, the elderly
People with respiratory conditions like asthma, bronchitis and emphysema
People with heart disease
Pregnant women.

For more information on the risks associated with dust storms please see the NMED's website at www.nmenv.state.nm.us or call NMED at (800) 224-7009.

For more information, call Michael Baca, Environmental Analyst, NMED Air Quality Bureau at (575) 647-7983.

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