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May 1, 2008
For Immediate Release

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New American Lung Association Report Shows New Mexico's Air is among the Cleanest in the Nation

(Santa Fe, N.M.) A new report by the American Lung Association that rates air quality in cities and counties across the nation shows New Mexico's air is among the cleanest in the country.

The report, called State of The Air: 2008 (www.stateoftheair.org/), names Farmington and the Santa Fe-Espanola area in New Mexico among the cleanest in the nation for short-term particle pollution. Air monitors in those areas of the state reported no days with unhealthy levels of particulate matter less than 2.5 microns. Particulate matter of this size is considered the most hazardous to public health as it can be inhaled into the lungs easily.

"This report reflects that the strong efforts we have made to keep our air healthy and combat climate change are working," said Governor Bill Richardson. "I am proud that New Mexicans can enjoy some of the cleanest air in the nation, and on my watch, it will stay that way."

The report also named Albuquerque among three cities that "scored the best for ozone and annual levels of particle pollution." The other cities are Duluth, Minnesota and Honolulu, Hawaii.

"We will continue to do more to improve air quality in New Mexico but this report shows that New Mexico is on the right track," said New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry. "That work includes ensuring that we reduce pollution from major sources including the oil and gas and transportation sectors."

The association measured air quality, including smog, soot and annual levels of particle pollution, based on reports submitted by states to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The report tracks averages of pollution levels reported for 2004 to 2006.

Particulate pollution, like that coming from vehicle exhaust smoke, refers to a mixture of miniscule solid and liquid particles found in the air we breathe, the report states. Ozone is formed by chemical reactions in the atmosphere from two raw gases from of tailpipes, smokestacks and many other sources. Ozone is composed of nitrogen oxides (NOx) and hydrocarbons, referred to as volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

Among the counties in New Mexico named in the report, Bernalillo, Dona Ana, Eddy, Lea, San Juan and Sandoval, all received either an A or a B in the ozone category. Bernalillo County's grade for ozone improved from a C to an A. However, San Juan County's grade dropped from an A to a B.

For particulate pollution days, those counties received grades ranging from A to C. Dona Ana County's grade improved from a D to a C and Lea County's grade improved from a B to an A.

The report names ozone and particulate pollution as the most dangerous and widespread air pollutants. According to the report, "recent research has revealed new insights into how they can harm the body — including taking the lives of infants and altering the lungs of children."

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