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Environment Department Signs Historic Settlement Agreement Ending Open Burning and Mandating \$10.5 Million in Improvements at Kirtland Air Force Base

(Santa Fe, NM) – The New Mexico Environment Department reached a settlement agreement with the U.S. Air Force over hazardous waste management procedures at Kirtland Air Force Base’s aging bulk fuel storage facility and open burn unit.

The settlement requires Kirtland to replace the fuel storage facility with a state-of-the-art unit, and cease operations of a treatment unit that burns hazardous waste munitions. The agreement settles the Department’s assessment of fines for alleged violations, some uncovered as a result of Kirtland AFB’s self-disclosures, and others by an NMED compliance inspection in July 2008.

“Members of the local community have long complained about open hazardous waste burning at Kirtland,” said NMED Secretary Ron Curry. “We have been listening and are proud to have helped end this practice once and for all. I want to applaud the Air Force for sitting down and negotiating a solid agreement that will help protect Albuquerque’s air and aquifers for years to come.”

“Kirtland AFB is committed to being responsible stewards of the environment and will continue to evaluate existing base processes and programs to ensure full compliance with all environmental regulations,” said Col. Michael S. Duvall, installation commander. “I appreciate the Department’s willingness to sit down with the base and come to a mutually beneficial agreement which will help protect the base and the community in the future.”

Under the settlement, Kirtland agreed to perform two environmental projects. KAFB will immediately cease operating the Open Burn Treatment Unit, which will eliminate all air emissions due to burning hazardous waste munitions. KAFB will also withdraw its request for continued operation of the Open Burn Unit currently under consideration by the Department.

In addition, Kirtland will replace the bulk fuel storage facility, which includes 4.2-million and 2.1-million-gallon fuel tanks. Due to their age and design, the floating roof seals on the tanks leak allowing precipitation to enter the tanks. The tanks must then be “dewatered” to insure the integrity of the fuel needed for planes. As a result of the dewatering process, over 350,000 pounds of hazardous wastewater was produced in 2007 alone.

Replacing the existing bulk fuel storage facility with a state-of-the-art facility, including new tanks, a remodeled pump house and new fuel unload/fill stations, will greatly reduce the amount of hazardous waste generated at the base and greatly reduce the likelihood of any releases from the new system. Kirtland will also excavate, test and dispose of any contaminated soil at the site. The \$10.5-million renovation project is scheduled to be completed by September 2011.

Kirtland employs approximately 20,000 military, civilian and contractor personnel. KAFB is a large quantity generator of hazardous waste that is produced in support of the base's missions, operations, research and development. Kirtland operates its hazardous waste treatment units under State permits.

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