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**Environment Secretary Urges EPA Administrator to Reverse Course on Decision to
Leave Harmful Contaminant Unregulated**

Perchlorate Standard Must be Set to Protect New Mexico's Drinking Water

(Santa Fe, NM) – New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry urged the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to provide greater protections for state drinking water by regulating perchlorate – a component of rocket fuel. The contaminant has been discovered in numerous drinking water systems and groundwater aquifers across the state and can have detrimental health effects on humans, particularly pregnant women, newborns and children.

Secretary Curry sent a letter to EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson detailing the state's concerns after the federal agency preliminarily decided it would not set a drinking-water safety standard for the chemical (the letter is attached).

“We must protect our state's limited drinking water supply from this harmful contaminant,” said New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry. He also expresses concerns in the letter that the scientific model that the federal agency used to support its decision has not been fully peer reviewed and vetted by outside scientists. Yet EPA intends to reach a final decision on perchlorate by December. “We are concerned that EPA is rushing to a decision on perchlorate -- without sufficient consideration -- in the closing days of the current administration. EPA's decision is driven by politics and reducing cleanup requirements for the military rather than protection of public health based on science.”

Most perchlorate contamination in drinking water across the country stems from improper disposal by rocket test sites, military bases and chemical plants. No national safety standard exists for perchlorate levels in drinking water. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has set a maximum contaminant level for drinking water, and a groundwater cleanup level for perchlorate at 2 micrograms per liter. The State of California has set a maximum contaminant level for drinking water for perchlorate at 6 micrograms per liter.

Perchlorate has been shown to interfere with thyroid gland function. According to EPA, it can be especially harmful to children and pregnant women.

Federal law requires the EPA Administrator to regulate a drinking water contaminant when the contaminant occurs in drinking water, or when it is likely to occur in drinking water, at a frequency and at levels that pose a concern to public health. EPA must also determine that regulating such a contaminant could reduce the risks to public health from drinking contaminated water.

In making its preliminary decision, EPA underestimated the number of persons whose health could be affected. It failed to account for some sensitive populations, particularly infants, and people with thyroid disorders.

Perchlorate is used at Los Alamos National Laboratory to process plutonium. The contaminant has been detected in drinking water systems and monitoring wells across the state at Cannon Air Force Base in Clovis, Melrose Bombing Range near Clovis, Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque, Los Alamos National Laboratory in Northern New Mexico, Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque, White Sands Missile Range near Socorro, Holloman Air Force Base near Alamogordo.

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