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**Environment Department Receives More Than 500 Requests to Test Private Well Water
in Santa Fe Area**

Initial Samples Indicate Some Wells in Glorieta Have High Natural Mineral Content

(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 Good Water Co. received more than 500 requests to sample private water wells in the Santa Fe area. Those entities will no longer accept other requests for well testing because of the huge response the department received when it offered to sample water this week.

The department took water samples from 387 wells by Friday in the testing area. That area includes the City of Santa Fe, north to Tesuque, east to Canonicito and Glorieta, south to Lamy, Eldorado and La Cienega, and west to the Rio Grande.

“Our Environmental Health Division staff is working overtime to accommodate the requests,” said New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry. “We are happy to work with the other entities to provide this important public service that will help residents determine the quality of their water.”

Samples from well testing so far have shown some wells in Glorieta have a natural high mineral content. Many residents served by those wells do not drink that water because of its bad taste. Minerals from shallow bedrock in the area are dissolving into groundwater. The department will advise affected residents of options in treating the water after tests are complete. Tests are expected to be finished in about 12 weeks from the time the water is sampled.

The tests began Tuesday and were expected to continue this week. However, because of the high volume of requests, the department will continue sampling the requests that were received as of Monday.

The 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.

The department hopes to offer free testing again for Santa Fe and other areas in the future. LANL has said it plans to offer the tests every three to five years. 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 believes most wells in the area probably have good quality water. However, because of the ongoing drought and mining of the aquifer, NMED wants to determine whether natural contaminants like arsenic, selenium, uranium, radium and fluoride are becoming more concentrated in groundwater.

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.

The department is taking field measurements, water samples and noting 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.

Water supplied by public drinking water systems was not tested because 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.

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