



STATE OF NEW MEXICO

## Environment Department

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### NEWS RELEASE

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### **CHRISTUS® St. Vincent Regional Medical Center Pays \$21,400 Penalty to New Mexico Environment Department**

CHRISTUS® St. Vincent Regional Medical Center in Santa Fe paid a \$21,400 civil penalty to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) on April 28, 2011. The fine was assessed in a recent compliance order alleging the improper disposal of infectious waste at the Caja Del Rio Landfill in Santa Fe. The compliance order also cited the medical center's failure to properly label containers of infectious waste and the failure to secure the infectious waste storage building from unauthorized access, as identified during an inspection of the medical center by the NMED Solid Waste Bureau.

The improperly-disposed infectious waste was discovered during a waste screening inspection at the landfill, and was found inside both clear, unlabeled plastic bags and red bio-hazard-labeled plastic bags. The infectious waste included gauze, napkins, disposable diapers, plastic tubing, latex gloves, suction containers, plastic urine containers and syringes that contained or were saturated or contaminated with blood, bloody liquids or other potentially infectious material. Used, but empty, bio-hazard labeled plastic bags were also discovered in the waste.

Infectious waste is specifically prohibited from landfill disposal by the New Mexico Solid Waste Rules. It is a special waste with unique handling, transportation, treatment and disposal requirements to assure that it does not come into contact with humans in a manner that could spread disease.

Prior to partnering with CHRISTUS Health in 2008, the former St. Vincent Regional Medical Center received a compliance order from the NMED for unauthorized disposal of infectious waste at the Caja del Rio Landfill on three separate instances during 2007. That compliance order assessed a civil penalty of \$55,800 and was settled in lieu of a hearing by payment of \$43,500 reduced civil penalty. In addition, the medical center received a Notice of Violation for similar incidents involving the improper disposal of infectious waste during September and October of 2006.

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