



## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **Health Risks of Dust Storms in Doña Ana and Luna Counties**

**Santa Fe** – Officials at the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), the cities of Las Cruces and Deming, and at Luna and Doña Ana and Counties advise citizens of Doña Ana and Luna Counties of the potential risks associated with dust storms.

A combination of weather conditions, features of the natural environment, and human activity can contribute to high levels of windblown dust, or dust storms. High winds can raise large amounts of dust from areas of dry, loose, exposed soil. In the Doña Ana and Luna Counties areas, high winds are most common during the spring.

Doña Ana County and Luna County each typically experience ten days per year when their air exceeds the National Ambient Air Quality Standard for airborne particulate matter of ten microns or less in size due to dust storms. Ten microns is about 1/7<sup>th</sup> the diameter of a human hair. The ten micron standard was developed to protect the public's health and welfare.

Dust storms are common in this southwestern part of New Mexico and they are inherent to arid climates. However, although the dust storms are common, the inhalation of dust can cause a number of serious health problems and can make some health problems worse, according to officials at the Environment Department. Dust can irritate the lungs and trigger asthma attacks, as well as allergic reactions. For people who already suffer from these conditions, the dust can cause serious breathing problems. Dust can also cause coughing, wheezing and runny noses. Breathing large amounts of dust for prolonged periods can result in chronic breathing and lung problems.

Breathing too much dust can potentially harm anyone. However, the following groups run the highest risk of being adversely affected by a dust storm:

- Infants, children, and teens,
- The elderly,
- People with respiratory conditions like asthma, bronchitis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and emphysema,
- People with heart or lung disease, and
- Pregnant women.

The best precaution to take during a dust storm is simply to avoid going outside. If residents must go outside, they are advised to spend as little time outside as possible, avoid hard exercise and wear some type of covering over the nose and mouth to provide protection from larger dust particles.

For more information on the risks associated with dust storms please see NMED's website at [www.nmenv.state.nm.us/aqb](http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/aqb) or contact NMED at 1-800-224-7009.

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