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State Environment Department Alerts Doña Ana and Luna County Residents of Risks Associated with Dust Storms

Santa Fe – The New Mexico Environment Department, along with the cities of Las Cruces and Deming, and Doña Ana and Luna Counties, is advising the 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 County area, high winds are most common during the spring.

Doña Ana and Luna Counties typically experience ten days a year when dust storms cause exceedances of the National Ambient Air Quality Standard for airborne particulate matter 10 microns or less in size, which is about 1/7th the diameter of a human hair. This standard was developed to protect the public's health and welfare.

Although dust storms are common in this part of New Mexico and are inherent to arid climates, inhaling dust can cause a number of serious health problems and can make some health problems worse. It can irritate the lungs and trigger asthma attacks, as well as allergic reactions. For people who already suffer from these conditions, 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, COPD and emphysema,
- People with heart or lung disease, and
- Pregnant women.

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The best precaution to take during a dust storm is simply to avoid going outside. If you must go outside, 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 New Mexico Environment Department's website at www.env.nm.gov/aqb or contact the department at 1-800-224-7009.

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