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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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*The Environment Department's mission is to protect and restore the environment and to foster a healthy and prosperous New Mexico for present and future generations.*

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### **NMED and DOH to offer 200 free domestic water well tests in Rio Arriba County this weekend**

*Tests indicate pH levels and presence of nitrates, arsenic and other contaminants*

**RIO ARRIBA COUNTY** – Surveys show the majority of New Mexican private well users haven't had their water tested, even though most do not have water treatment systems installed.

To save consumers money – tests are valued at around \$150 – and to educate the public about safe drinking water, the New Mexico Environment Department and New Mexico Department of Health are hosting a free domestic well water testing event in Ghost Ranch on Saturday, May 11.

“With 20 percent of New Mexicans using private water wells, our free water testing events are a great opportunity for private well owners to learn more about what is in their water and how to keep it safe and clean,” said Environment Department Secretary James Kenney. “I encourage Rio Arriba County residents to come out and participate.”

The free tests will be available from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. May 11 at the Ghost Ranch Museum Classroom, 280 Private Dr. 1708 Highway, US-84, Abiquiu, NM. Tests will be offered on a first-come, first-served basis to the first 200 participants or while supplies are available. Test results will be mailed to households following the event.

“Well testing is critical, as private well characteristics can vary greatly from one well to the next, even if the wells are right next to one another,” said Matthew Smith, a geoscientist with the Environment Department's Ground Water Quality Bureau.

The state's “water fairs” provide an opportunity for Rio Arriba County households to check pH, specific conductance and levels of fluoride, iron, sulfate and nitrate in their well water. These constituents may be naturally occurring or result from sources including fertilizer, animal waste and septic tanks. Drinking water with high levels of nitrate can be dangerous to pregnant women and infants, while other contaminants may lead to other health problems and aesthetic nuisances.

Additionally, well owners will be able to check the arsenic level in their water, an option not commonly included in the state's general testing. Arsenic is naturally occurring and has been measured in water from private wells throughout the state, sometimes at concentrations that exceed recommended drinking water quality health standards.

The upkeep of private wells is the responsibility of the well owner. While the state's Environment and Health Departments conduct water fairs to help educate private well owners about safe drinking water, these state agencies do not have jurisdiction over New Mexicans' private wells.

To have water tested, residents need to bring a sample of their water to the event. The departments suggest:

- Fill a clean glass or plastic container without any strong odors with at least a quart or a liter (i.e. 32 OZ) of your well water.
- If the home has a whole house filtration system, collect the water at the well head prior to any filtration or softener systems if possible.
- Let the water run for 2-3 minutes before collecting the sample.
- Fill the container with water as close to the time of testing as possible

Along with the water sample, residents should bring basic information known about the well such as well depth, depth to water, well casing material (i.e., steel, PVC), well latitude/longitude, and distance from well to the nearest septic tank/leachfield system.

If well owners are unable to attend the event but would like to have their water tested, they may have their sample brought to the event by a family member or neighbor, provided the bottle is clearly labeled and has the owner's name, phone number, address, and information about the well attached. Only water that comes from homes that rely on private wells for drinking water will be tested.

Water from households that are connected to city/community/public water systems is periodically tested and those results are available at: <https://dww.water.net.env.nm.gov/DWW/>

More information about the water fair program is at <https://www.env.nm.gov/gwqb/water-fairs/>.

More information about wells, water quality and safety is available at <https://nmtracking.org/water>.

For more information about this water fair, please contact the Environment Department at (505)827-2797.

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