

**MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM, GOVERNOR**

James C. Kenney, Cabinet Secretary

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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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## **El Paso Water fined for discharging 1.1 billion gallons of raw sewage into the Rio Grande River in Sunland Park, New Mexico**

*State seeking abatement, remediation and \$1.2 million in penalties*

**SUNLAND PARK** – On June 9, 2022, the New Mexico Environment Department issued Administrative Compliance Orders (ACOs) and associated fines of \$1.2 million to El Paso Water for illegally discharging an estimated 1.1 billion gallons of raw sewage into the Rio Grande River in Sunland Park, New Mexico. The ACOs also require that El Paso Water fix the problems that caused the illegal diversion and cleanup the impacted areas.

Beginning August 27, 2021, El Paso Water diverted untreated sewage in a dry reach of the Rio Grande River. El Paso Water illegally discharged six to ten million gallons of raw wastewater per day into the river just upstream of Corchesne Bridge at the Doniphan Outfall. The raw wastewater travelled downstream along the New Mexico-Texas border for approximately 1.9 miles. The illegal discharge did not cease until January 10, 2022, a total of 136 days. El Paso Water never reported the unauthorized discharge to the NMED, in violation of the Water Quality Act and Water Quality Control Commission regulations.

“El Paso Water’s flagrant disregard for the health and welfare of New Mexicans in Sunland is astonishing,” said **Environment Cabinet Secretary James Kenney**. “We are holding this polluter accountable for their malfeasance and will not stop doing so until the damage is corrected and El Paso Water can assure the New Mexico Environment Department such a discharge will not happen again.”

Discharges of untreated sewage typically contain disease-causing bacteria and viruses known as pathogens. Such pathogens can cause diseases like cholera, giardia, and hepatitis A. Untreated sewage also contains harmful chemicals, like ammonia and nitrogen, that adversely impact public health and the environment. The discharge of untreated wastewater into a surface waterbody and groundwater can pose a significant hazard to public health and our economy if it impacts public water supplies, private homeowner drinking water wells, crop irrigation, livestock watering or outdoor recreational activities.

Any Sunland Park residents on private well water in need of testing are encouraged to review the fact sheets available at <https://www.env.nm.gov/gwqb/water-fairs/> and contact the Ground Water Quality Bureau at 505-827-2900.

The ACO’s assess a civil penalty of \$1,284,375; require the immediate implementation of security and cleanup actions to mitigate the potential hazards to human health; and require development and

submittal of corrective action plans. The ACO's also require corrective actions to assess potential future impacts to the health and environment.

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