

**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.

Contact: Jorge Estrada, Public Relations Coordinator
New Mexico Environment Department
505.690-5326 | george.estrada@env.nm.gov

Environment Department issues update on drinking water from Camino Real Regional Utility Authority

pH levels are back to normal levels, department issues initial findings

DOÑA ANA COUNTY — The New Mexico Environment Department's Drinking Water Bureau (DWB) provided an update on the status of drinking water from the Camino Real Regional Utility Authority (CRRUA) in Doña Ana County. A "Do Not Drink" order was confirmed by DWB on Friday, December 1, 2023.

CRRUA informed the Environment Department that elevated pH levels were detected in the water system's distribution system on the afternoon of December 1, 2023, after DWB staff began receiving reports from residents of "slimy" area tap water. DWB staff have been onsite throughout the week both investigating the cause of the elevated pH issues as well as conducting a routine inspection scheduled prior to this incident.

Initial findings by DWB staff indicate that an operational failure by CRRUA led to a considerable amount of caustic soda being injected into the water that was sent out to customers. Caustic soda solutions are used to adjust pH in many drinking water treatment applications. pH is a measure of the acidity or alkalinity of water. CRRUA uses a caustic soda solution to adjust the pH adjustment in their arsenic treatment process.

"Caustic soda is common in soils, groundwater, plants, and in animal tissues," said **New Mexico Department of Health Deputy Secretary Dr. Laura Parajon**. "However, when caustic soda is in water in abnormally high amounts, repeated or prolonged contact may cause skin inflammation."

DWB has confirmed that all distribution areas have tested within normal pH levels. Although the pH levels have returned to normal, CRRUA has recommended that affected areas turn on all faucets and run the water for at least 25 minutes to push out the old water that may have remained in the water lines.

DWB expects to publish a report of its findings once the investigation has been completed, as well as a report detailing other deficiencies that were identified during the routine inspection. DWB will continue to work with the system and require that the system establish safeguards to ensure that operational failures like this do not occur again.

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