



MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM, GOVERNOR
James C. Kenney, Cabinet Secretary

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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Camino Real Regional Utility Authority exceeds Arsenic Drinking Water Standard

Unannounced sampling conducted by the Environment Department reveals one sample above standard, nine samples below the standard

DOÑA ANA COUNTY — On March 15, 2024, the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) Drinking Water Bureau (DWB) conducted unannounced arsenic sampling at the Camino Real Regional Utility Authority (CRRUA) in Doña Ana County. While CRRUA has been ordered to comply with drinking water regulations, the Department is also taking independent action including conducting unannounced sampling to assure the health and safety of residents.

On March 26, 2024, NMED DWB received the results from the laboratory. Of the ten drinking water samples collected and analyzed, nine of the ten samples were below the federal drinking water Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) of 0.010 mg/L. One sample had levels above the arsenic drinking water sample that was collected from the Industrial Park area of their distribution system. This exceedance of the arsenic drinking water standard is further evidence that violations have occurred at CRRUA.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) set the arsenic standard for drinking water at 0.010 mg/L to protect consumers from the effects of long-term, chronic exposure to arsenic. Public drinking water systems, like CRRUA, were obligated to comply with the current arsenic drinking water standard level as of January 23, 2006 – over 18 years ago.

The investigative sample results are included below:

Table with 3 columns: Sample Location, Sample Result (mg/L), and Arsenic MCL 0.010 (mg/L). It lists 10 sampling locations with their respective results, showing one above and nine below the MCL.

1673 McNutt Rd, Sunland Park NM	0.0058	Below MCL
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On March 1, 2024, [NMED issued CRRUA an administrative order](#) that included \$251,580 in penalties for continued violations of the federal Safe Drinking Water Act and New Mexico Drinking Water Regulations. While CRRUA has appealed NMED's administrative order, the Department will vigorously defend its action to hold CRRUA accountable for any and all violations.

In addition, NMED began additional investigations into CRRUA's operations through a [March 27, 2024 information demand letter](#). The investigation focuses on CRRUA's management of the arsenic treatment systems by seeking records related to sampling data, internal communications, financial and other information. CRRUA has 21 days to provide NMED with this information of face civil or criminal sanctions. This investigation will inform additional actions the Department may take against CRRUA.

On March 14, 2024, [NMED alerted the New Mexico Department of Justice and the New Mexico Office of the State Auditor](#) to the ongoing compliance issues at CRRUA. NMED sought their assistance in investigating CRRUA for any potential violations of consumer protection laws and possible waste, fraud, and abuse of state and federal funds, respectively. CRRUA has received more than \$13.6M in state loans and grants for water and wastewater projects from the since 2012.

According to the U.S. EPA, arsenic is an odorless and tasteless contaminate in drinking water that often enters drinking water supplies from natural deposits in the earth. Exposure to arsenic can cause adverse health impacts, including:

- Thickening and discoloration of the skin,
- Stomach pain,
- Nausea,
- Vomiting,
- Diarrhea,
- Numbness in hands and feet,
- Partial paralysis, and
- Blindness.

Further, arsenic has been linked to a number of cancers. These include cancer of the bladder, lungs, skin, kidney, nasal passages, liver, and prostate. Often, children are more susceptible to arsenic exposure due to their lower body weight.

Residents can take precautions to reduce exposure by minimizing consumption of drinking water containing high arsenic levels. Bathing in water containing low levels of arsenic (below 0.500 mg/L) is less risky as arsenic does not readily absorb through the skin. Similarly, washing dishes, utensils and clothes in water containing low levels of arsenic (below 0.500 mg/L) is generally safe as well.

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