



NEWS RELEASE **For Immediate Release**

Dec. 9, 2025

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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.

Free well testing available for Mora, San Miguel & Taos counties *Initiative responds to metals found in wildfire burn scar groundwater*

MORA COUNTY — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) is offering free private well water testing to well owners in parts of Mora, San Miguel and Taos counties located within one mile of the Hermits Peak-Calf Canyon burn scar area.

This initiative responds to water quality testing conducted as part of a 2025 independent geological study, which showed the presence of heavy metals in some of the wells tested in the area. Well owners in this area can sign up for free well testing by completing NMED's form at <https://www.env.nm.gov/morasanmigueltaos-pws/mora-san-miguel-and-taos-county-private-well-sampling-form/>.

This program prioritizes domestic wells to ensure that household drinking water remains safe. However, NMED is encouraging owners of privately-owned wells that serve businesses, including restaurants and other establishments that provide drinking water to the public, to sign up for free testing.

"While the Federal Emergency Management Agency considers reimbursing homeowners and the state for the cleanup of contaminated drinking water, the Environment Department will not hesitate to step in and offer services to this community," said **Environment Secretary James Kenney**. "This private well water testing effort aims to not only inform residents of what's in their water but chart the path towards full remediation."

The 2025 independent study of groundwater in the burn scar of the Hermits Peak-Calf Canyon wildfire found that four metals — antimony, arsenic, cadmium, and uranium — exceeded the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's safe drinking water limits. The independent geologic study focused on Mora County also found elevated levels of manganese, above the U.S. EPA's guidelines for safe drinking water.

The levels detected do not indicate an immediate health emergency. However, long-term use of water with elevated heavy metals can increase health risks over time. Potential effects include:

- Changes in liver function or blood chemistry from antimony
- Increased risk of cardiovascular disease and certain cancers from arsenic
- Impacts on the kidney from cadmium
- Effects on the brain and nervous system from manganese
- Increased risk of kidney damage from uranium

Infants, young children, pregnant women and people with existing liver or kidney conditions are more vulnerable to these risks.

Because these contaminants can create long-term health concerns when people drink or cook with the water, the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) and NMED advise residents in the area to avoid consuming untreated water while the Department completes additional evaluation and sampling.

These findings reinforce the importance of testing private wells and taking steps to reduce exposure where elevated levels are present. [Free well sampling is available](#) to help homeowners understand their water quality and determine whether treatment or alternative water sources are needed for drinking and cooking.

How to sign up for testing and access safe drinking water

NMED is partnering with Eastern Research Group, Inc. (ERG) to offer free well testing to evaluate water quality. Well owners who complete the sign-up form will receive an email or phone call from an ERG staff person to schedule testing.

In addition to heavy metals, the laboratory will test for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), an emerging contaminant NMED is evaluating for prevalence statewide. NMED is working to understand the levels of PFAS in this area while testing for other contaminants, but the potential presence of PFAS is not necessarily linked to wildfire activity.

Well owners will receive their test results approximately three to four weeks after testing by email or mail depending on the homeowner's preference. NMED will offer homeowners the opportunity to speak with agency staff about their results. Spanish language services are available upon request in NMED's sign-up form.

Homeowners awaiting test results should take advantage of alternative drinking water provided by the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM).

Drinking water is available for pickup Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Mora County Courthouse, 1 Courthouse Dr. in Mora. Residents will need to bring containers to fill up using the self-serve water tank.

Questions and concerns related to the private wells in the Hermits Peak-Calf Canyon burn scar area should contact NMED at hpccsampling@env.nm.gov.

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504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and Section 13 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972. If you have any questions about this notice or any of NMED's non-discrimination programs, policies or procedures, you may contact: Kate Cardenas, Non-Discrimination Coordinator | NMED | 1190 St. Francis Dr., Suite N4050 | P.O. Box 5469 | Santa Fe, NM 87502 or (505) 827-2855 or nd.coordinator@env.nm.gov. If you believe that you have been discriminated against with respect to a NMED program or activity, you may contact the Non-Discrimination Coordinator.

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