



Environment Department

SUSANA MARTINEZ, GOVERNOR

Ryan Flynn, Cabinet Secretary
Butch Tongate, Deputy Secretary

NEWS RELEASE

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NMED'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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Gold King Mine Spill's Groundwater Influence Still Being Investigated in New Mexico *Plume Passes through New Mexico but Sediments are Left Behind*

Santa Fe – Today, seven well water testing teams were deployed by the New Mexico Environment Department in concert with the Environmental Protection Agency to test domestic water wells near the Animas River which flows through Farmington and Aztec, New Mexico. “Although the Gold King Mine Spill’s heavy metals plume has mostly passed through the area, the sediments left behind are capable of influencing groundwater quality,” said New Mexico Environment Secretary Ryan Flynn.

“We are operating with an abundance of caution, on behalf of New Mexicans’ health and safety, by advising that no water from San Juan County’s domestic wells or from the Animas River be used for bathing, cooking, drinking, or for watering livestock or crops. We want to be certain that domestic well water is safe and that Animas River water is safe, before we would evaluate lifting our water quality safety precautions.”

The Animas River is the site of the heavy metals wastewater plume that flowed from EPA’s Gold King Mine spill of August 5th. Teams of scientists, engineers, and technicians have fanned out across San Juan County this week to test domestic wells for hydrogeological properties such as elevation and conductivity in relation to those wells’ ability to transmit contamination from the plume, or from the sediments left in its wake. In addition, water samples from these same wells are being collected and tested for heavy metals by conducting laboratory analysis with initial results expected tomorrow, then throughout the week. The Environment Department is also operating a walk-in water testing station every day at the San Juan County Fair, located near the Sherriff’s office from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. through Saturday.

Governor Susana Martinez declared a state of emergency yesterday with an Executive Order, freeing up \$750,000 in state funds for water well testing, for evaluating the potential long-term effects of the spill, for support of the state’s multi-agency response team, and for other mitigation and response efforts that become necessary in the future. These funds are in addition to the \$500,000 in state emergency funds that Environment Secretary Ryan Flynn secured from the Hazardous Waste Emergency Fund last Friday.

The Environment Department continues gathering samples from San Juan County’s Animas & San Juan River and has posted the preliminary results of those tests at www.NMEDRiverWaterSafety.org. Also posted are EPA’s publically released data of Colorado’s Cement Creek and the Upper Animas River.

Finally, the Environment Department's results from well testing in the Animas floodplain indicate that the specific conductivity for ground water is higher than the river water's specific conductivity. This means that it is likely that the floodplain ground water feeds the river flow and the threat of contamination of wells is reduced.. However the Environment Department's water quality safety precautions remain in place for San Juan County.

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SIDEBAR:

New Mexico Environment Department's Water Quality Safety Precautions for San Juan County

Adherence to the following important safety measures is critical during and after the period of time that the Gold King mining wastewater release courses through the Animas and San Juan Rivers and surrounding communities. It is likely precautions will be needed for several days and possibly longer. Plan accordingly.

Do Not Use Nearby "Floodplain Level" Wells. If you live in the Animas River or San Juan River flood plain and your wellhead is at roughly the same level as the river, the Environment Department advises you to refrain from using the water for cooking and drinking or any human or animal ingestion until further notice. Do not boil river water in an attempt to purify it and use it for ingestion. Boiling the contaminated water will not remove potential contaminants.

Do Not Draw Canal or River Water. People who draw domestic water directly from the Animas River, San Juan Rivers or from irrigation canals should refrain from using the water until further notice.

Do Conserve Water. Conservation of water is critical during the time that the pulse of contaminated water is passing through the region, and possibly for days thereafter. Until the concentration of constituents is known, drinking water systems and nearby well water users are refraining from drawing the river water, and thus supplying customers from limited clean water reserves.

Do Get Potable Water from Water Stations. Potable water stations have been set up through San Juan County's Office of Emergency Management for residents at:

Center Point Fire Station # 1 – 16 Road 2755

Flora Vista Fire Station #1 – 2 Road 3275

Valley Fire Station #4 – 4 Road 6200

Bring your own water containers. No large tanks. Check www.sjcounty.net for further locations.

Do Not Water Livestock. Livestock owners should refrain from watering livestock from Animas or San Juan River water.

Do Not Ingest Fish from the Rivers. The New Mexico Game and Fish Department advises anglers not to fish in the Animas River and not to eat fish caught in the San Juan River watershed.

Please visit www.NMEDRiverWaterSafety.org for continuing updates and informational resources.