STATE OF NEW MEXICO
Environment Department

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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.

NEWS RELEASE
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Environment Department tackles PFAS contamination while sampling for chemicals in drinking water sources across New Mexico

Contract awarded to begin mapping plumes at two military installations while sampling project provides more insight into presence of PFAS in drinking water resources

As part of New Mexico's efforts to protect communities from per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) is beginning work to address the contamination caused by the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) at Cannon and Holloman Air Force bases. In a separate effort, the Environment Department is testing public drinking water sources across the state to determine if PFAS is impacting other communities and fresh water resources. These efforts will assist the Environment Department in determining next steps in identifying and managing PFAS contamination in New Mexico.

PFAS are a group of manmade chemicals used in a variety of products, including food packaging, non-stick pans and aqueous film forming foams (AFFF) used to extinguish fuel-based fires. Growing concerns about PFAS contamination are driven by evidence that exposure to some PFAS chemicals can lead to adverse health effects such as increased cholesterol, reproductive problems and cancer. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) has not yet established a drinking water standard for any of the PFAS chemicals, but has established a Lifetime Health Advisory level for two chemicals in the PFAS family – PFOA and PFOS – at 70 parts per trillion. According to the U.S. EPA, someone who drinks water exceeding 70 parts per trillion of PFOA and PFOS over a lifetime may suffer adverse health effects.

Contract awarded for additional analysis of plumes at Cannon, Holloman

During the 2020 legislative session, NMED was appropriated $1 million to begin addressing PFAS contamination in the communities of Clovis and Alamogordo. The appropriation was needed given the DOD failed to take appropriate steps to clean up the PFAS contamination it caused through its operations at the Cannon and Holloman installations. The State of New Mexico is engaged in ongoing litigation with the DOD to ensure the State and affected communities are not left financially responsible for environmental contamination caused by DOD.

On Jan. 4, 2021, NMED awarded an approximately $1 million contract to environmental consultant Daniel B Stephens & Associates, Inc., to begin addressing the PFAS contamination in Alamogordo and Clovis by further studying the size and movement of the groundwater plumes there. This work must be completed before any clean-up efforts can begin. The work will also include determining whether and to

what extent nearby public water systems are impacted as well as area wildlife. PFAS concentrations well above the U.S. EPA's Lifetime Health Advisory are present within these plumes.

"This is a major step forward in solving the problem handed to New Mexicans by the Defense Department." said NMED Cabinet Secretary James Kenney. "While New Mexicans are paying the bill for this effort today, the State is determined to recoup from the federal government every dollar we spend."

This work will begin in the next few weeks and NMED will keep the communities of Alamogordo and Clovis updated on the project's progress.

Sampling underway in 19 New Mexico counties

This sampling effort – which started in mid-2020 and will continue through mid-2021 – focuses on multiple ground and surface water supplies in 19 New Mexico counties. Results from 15 public water systems, as well as multiple surface water sampling locations, are available here. To date, the data from this effort does not indicate any imminent public health threats. NMED will add testing data as it becomes available over the course of the study. Prior to implementing this effort, NMED was only aware of PFAS contamination in drinking water supplies at a few locations around the state stemming from aqueous firefighting foams (AFFF) used at two U.S. DOD installations in Alamogordo and Clovis.

None of the results received so far show levels of PFOS or PFOA at or above the Lifetime Health Advisory. NMED notifies each drinking water system involved in the study of the results when they become available. In the absence of federal or state regulations specific to PFAS in drinking water, follow-up actions based on these results are at the discretion of the water system. NMED is providing support to these systems as requested, including guidance related to public notification and strategies to limit exposure.

If, during the study, levels of PFOS and PFOA are detected in drinking water resources above the Lifetime Health Advisory, NMED will work with public water systems to identify the best mitigation options, if requested.

"The first step toward addressing PFAS contamination in New Mexico is finding out where these chemicals are," said Rebecca Roose, NMED Water Protection Division Director. "We are vigilant in deploying our limited resources to gather the best available data and share it with the public in a transparent way."

NMED is conducting the sampling effort with the support of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). USGS will publish a final report of the findings in the summer of 2022. These results will be used to inform NMED's ongoing strategies and actions to address PFAS contamination in New Mexico, which may include additional sampling, source investigations, and treatment of contaminated water. NMED is also considering, in the continued absence of federal drinking water standards for PFAS, undertaking the resource-intensive process of developing state-specific standards in the coming years as additional data becomes available.

PFAS are known as "forever" chemicals because they do not easily degrade in the environment due to their chemical properties. Thus, PFAS can accumulate over time in soil, water, and living organisms and have been found in water sources around the world.

More information on PFAS is available on the U.S. EPA's website.

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