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NEWS RELEASE

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Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Cabinet Secretary Joanna Prukop Proposes Stricter Conditions on Brine Wells State-wide

Artesia brine well collapse prompts statewide review

SANTA FE, NM – Secretary Joanna Prukop has directed the Oil Conservation Division (OCD) to conduct a complete evaluation of the rules and regulations concerning brine wells, a method of creating saturated salt water used in oil and gas production. The OCD evaluation will include an internal audit and inspection of all existing brine wells in New Mexico. Secretary Prukop is considering strengthening oversight of brine wells to protect against well failures such as the recent collapse in Artesia that created a huge sinkhole and forced the closure of an Eddy County road.

“There are several brine wells in New Mexico and we must ensure that they are all properly monitored to ensure safety and stability,” stated Cabinet Secretary Joanna Prukop. “We have now seen that these wells can collapse and the extensive damage such a collapse can generate.”

The Oil Conservation Division is continuing to monitor and investigate the collapse of the brine well, located on state trust land 17.3 miles southeast of Artesia, which is still active. The well is owned by Jim’s Water Service. County Road 217 remains closed as a safety precaution, and a command center is on site. Division engineers estimate that the well is approximately 300 to 400 feet in diameter, 70 feet to the water level, and the actual depth to the bottom is unknown.

Scientists from the Oil Conservation Division, the Bureau of Land Management, State Land Office, the New Mexico Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources, and the National Cave & Karst Research Institute are all working together to assess horizontal and vertical movements to project any future subsidence. Work on a protective fence and keep-out signage began yesterday with completion expected on Friday.

In a related issue, the Oil Conservation Division has also been closely monitoring a brine well operated by I & W, Inc located in Carlsbad, NM. Yesterday, following ongoing inquiries from OCD the operator decided voluntarily to stop operation of the well. The division will work with I & W, Inc. to ensure that the well is properly plugged, permanently abandoned, and monitored for the long term.

Images provided on the brine well collapse are courtesy of National Cave and Karst Research Institute:



Morning, July 20, 2008 at 10:44 am.
courtesy of National Cave and Karst Research Institute



Morning, July 22, 2008
courtesy of National Cave and Karst Research Institute

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The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department provides resource protection and renewable energy resource development services to the public and other state agencies.

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