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For Immediate Release
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Arsenic Removal Plant Hailed by Local Legislators, Officials

Two cutting-edge arsenic removal facilities, among the first to be put into service in New Mexico since a new federal standard went into effect, were lauded today by state legislators and industry officials alike.

Speaking to a crowd of more than a hundred, including state legislators and water officials, New Mexico Public Regulation Commissioner David King praised the project as innovative and timely.

“New Mexico groundwater contains from 2 to 40 parts per billion of arsenic,” said King. “Meeting the old standard of 50 was not difficult. Meeting a standard of 10 parts per billion is another story...but it can be done, and today you can see exactly how.”

Arsenic is a naturally occurring mineral that is a known carcinogen at high concentrations and is linked to other health effects, such as skin damage and circulatory problems. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, in early 2001, made the arsenic standard more stringent, lowering it from 50 parts per billion to 10. The rule became effective on Feb. 22, 2002. The compliance date was January 23 of this year. Unlike many of the state’s water systems, New Mexico Utilities, Inc. had its removal plants up and running by the January deadline rather than seek a compliance extension.

New Mexico Utilities, which serves water to about 50,000 people in the northwest part of the city of Albuquerque and the northern portion of Bernalillo County, researched seven treatment methods before deciding on an adsorption technology. In the process, water is passed through an adsorption media. Arsenic molecules stick to the media as the water passes through. The cost of both treatment

plants is \$2.7 million, and the media will need to be replaced periodically. In all, the process is affordable.

“The treatment you see here today adds about \$47 per acre-foot (326,000 gallons) of treated water,” said King. “That’s about 1.4 cents for every hundred gallons of water. And to deal with the most serious water quality issue our state has ever seen, that’s 1.4 cents well spent.”

. According to Bob Gay, vice president and general manager of New Mexico Utilities, there will be no water rate increase required to pay for the arsenic removal.

“We’ve had about five years to plan for this expense, and through a combination of prudent spending, accompanied by growth in the number of customers we serve, we’ve been able to fully fund the plants at no cost to our customers.”

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