



New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson Statement on USDA Decision Recalling to Service 5 Firefighting Heavy Air Tankers

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SANTA FE, NM- New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, who has consistently called for the USDA to rescind its sudden decision to ground the nation's 33 heavy air tankers, today issued this statement regarding the decision to recall five of the aircraft to service:

"I am pleased that the Bush administration has finally responded to the majority of western governors calling for the reinstatement of these critical firefighting tools. This is a step in the right direction, but it is not enough. Severe fires in Alaska, Arizona, and in other areas have drained the resources capable of fighting wildfires, leaving states vulnerable and unable to attack new fires before they get out of control. I am deeply concerned about the extreme fire danger throughout the west caused by the ongoing drought and recent hot, dry weather. Once again, I call on the administration to get more large firefighting planes back into the air."

Southwest Region fire managers have placed an order for three of the air tankers to be stationed in the Arizona/New Mexico area, where the fire activity has been intense.

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