



State of New Mexico

Office of the Governor

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Governor Richardson Orders Safety Inspections of New Mexico's Underground Mines

(Santa Fe, NM) – Governor Bill Richardson today ordered thorough safety inspections of all New Mexico's underground mines. This action follows the recent tragic mining disaster in Sago, West Virginia. Governor Richardson also extended his condolences to the families of the miners who died tragically.

“Like West Virginia, New Mexico has a long history with mining. We understand how it feels to send a loved one ‘down in the hole’ every day,” Governor Richardson said. “This tragedy again underlines what a hazardous occupation underground mining can be, especially coal mining.”

To make sure that New Mexico's miners are as safe as possible, the Governor has directed the State Mine Inspector and the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department to conduct safety inspections at the state's underground mines as soon as possible. This includes New Mexico's only underground coal mine, the San Juan Mine near Farmington, the potash mines between Hobbs and Carlsbad, and the Molycorp mine near Questa.

“The San Juan coal mine will be thoroughly inspected on Monday and our other underground mines will be inspected as soon as possible,” Governor Richardson said. “If problems are found, I will demand that they are fixed immediately. The State Mine Inspector has assured my office that the safety precautions already in place at the San Juan coal mine are far more advanced than those that were in use in Sago, West Virginia.”

The San Juan coal mine is operated by an Australian Company – BHP Billiton. It employs approximately 300 personnel. This mine has been in existence since November of 2000.

“Because this underground mine is relatively new, it is much different from the Sago mine in West Virginia where the disaster occurred,” said State Mine Inspector Rebecca S. Boam. “The San Juan Underground mine has installed state of the art technology to monitor conditions in the mine on a 24 hour basis. This system monitors for methane, oxygen, carbon monoxide, and hydrogen sulfide. The San Juan Underground Mine also has two escape elevators that have been pre-drilled to assist in emergency evacuations if this should become necessary. There are also four redundant communication systems throughout the mine.”

Following the inspection, the State Mine Inspector and the Mining and Minerals Division of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, will provide the Governor with a comprehensive report by the end of next week.

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