



State of New Mexico

Office of the Governor

For Immediate Release
January 30, 2006

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Governor Richardson Announces Support for Tough New Safety Legislation for Underground Mines

(Santa Fe, NM) – Governor Bill Richardson today announced his support for new mine safety legislation sponsored by Representative John Heaton and Senator Carlos Cisneros.

“Recent North American mine disasters have heightened awareness that the federal government has stalled, even backtracked, on mine safety,” stated Governor Richardson. “New Mexico’s miners deserve assurances that their workplaces are as safe as possible.”

In recent months, a series of mining disasters in West Virginia coal mines and a Canadian potash mine have put a spotlight on mine safety. Analysis on these breakdowns reveals that while the federal government’s failure to assure comprehensive below-ground supplies and communications may have contributed to unnecessary deaths in West Virginia, Saskatchewan’s tougher standards may have saved dozens of lives in the Canadian potash mine collapse last week.

In light of the West Virginia tragedy, Governor Joe Manchin III and the West Virginia Legislature have taken fast action to tighten up safety requirements for the state’s mines.

“I want to commend Governor Manchin. West Virginia has moved quickly to update its standards and our bill is modeled on many of those improvements,” said Governor Richardson.

The mine safety bill creates a 24-hour emergency operations center, requires mine operators to file and update Emergency Notification Plans, establishes standards for self-rescue equipment and caches in the mines, and requires that miners be provided with communications devices.

“I commend Governor Richardson for taking such a strong leadership role in mine safety,” said Senator Carlos Cisneros. “We can boast of an excellent mine safety record

in New Mexico's mines, and anything we can do here and now to strengthen safety can only help our mine workers. We owe it to them."

"The recent mining incidents give us additional pause for thought about safety for our miners in the state," said Representative Heaton. "And even though hard rock mining is generally very safe, there is always room for improvement. In my district where potash is mined and WIPP is located, we are extremely proud of the safety record and the fact that our mine rescue teams are recognized nationally and win national competitions. I am pleased our managers have worked on this act and support safety improvements."

To make sure that New Mexico's miners are as safe as possible, Governor Richardson also 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. Inspections completed to date include New Mexico's only underground coal mine, the San Juan Mine near Farmington, and the Molycorp mine near Questa. Inspections and reports on the potash mines between Hobbs and Carlsbad will be completed soon.

The State Mine Inspector will also sponsor a free informational presentation on **Friday, February 10 from 9 am to 1 pm at the Inn at Loretto in Santa Fe**. This presentation will give miners, operators, organized labor and regulators the opportunity to see and understand the technology available to provide emergency communications, and personal protective self-rescue devices to the miners who work in underground mines throughout New Mexico.

Please contact the Bureau of Mine Safety at (505) 835-5460 to register. There is no charge to attend.

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