



For Immediate Release  
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Contact: Marissa Stone  
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## **Governor Richardson Opposes Permit for Asarco Copper Smelter in El Paso Cites Air Pollution for New Mexico**

(Santa Fe, NM) – Governor Richardson sent a letter to Texas Governor Rick Perry today voicing New Mexico’s opposition to the renewal of the air permit that would allow the reopening of the Asarco Inc. copper smelter in El Paso, Texas.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) will soon decide whether to renew the permit for the facility, which is less than a mile from New Mexico’s border.

“I have serious concerns about the environmental harm and public health impacts that the renewal of Asarco’s air quality permit could create, especially in Doña Ana County,” Governor Richardson said. “I am concerned that the plant could produce air pollution that could negatively affect our citizens.”

New Mexico has voiced technical concerns about the permit renewal for the last three years. Air monitoring in the Paso del Norte air shed has shown elevated levels of ozone and particulate matter. That air shed includes the governments of Doña Ana County, the State of New Mexico, El Paso, TCEQ, Ciudad Juarez and the State of Chihuahua, Mexico.

Along with air pollution issues, southern Doña Ana County and Sunland Park, N.M. have soils contaminated with lead due, in part, to past operations of the Asarco El Paso plant. Those communities today face other air quality concerns, including elevated levels of airborne particulate matter and ground level ozone pollution.

The New Mexico Environment Department wrote a letter to the TCEQ asking it to review how air emissions from the smelter would affect New Mexico’s residents and the environment. The department will review the recent TCEQ report concerning the facility and make comments regarding the potential impacts to public health and the environment in Doña Ana County. Those comments will be released today.

The Asarco El Paso plant shut down in 1999 after the price of copper fell in the 1990s. Asarco operates another copper smelter in Hayden, Arizona.

For more information contact Marissa Stone, NMED Communications Director, at (505) 827-0314 or (505) 231-0475.

*Letter follows:*

October 1, 2007

Governor Rick Perry  
Office of the Governor  
State Insurance Building  
Austin, Texas 78701

Re: Renewal of the ASARCO, Inc.'s Air Quality Permit

Dear Governor Perry:

I am writing to express the State of New Mexico's opposition to the proposed reinstatement of the ASARCO, Inc. air quality permit by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). I have serious concerns about the environmental harm and public health impacts that may occur with the renewal of the ASARCO El Paso plant's air quality permit, especially in Doña Ana County, New Mexico. Our states share the Paso del Norte air shed. We are concerned about additional impacts from air pollution from the plant on New Mexico citizens as well as the residents in Texas. The residents in this area of our state are already burdened with pollution issues that negatively affect their health and environment.

New Mexico has voiced technical concerns about the permit renewal for ASARCO for the last three years. Monitoring in the Paso del Norte air shed has shown elevated levels of ozone and particulate matter. Along with air pollution issues, southern Doña Ana County and Sunland Park, New Mexico have soils contaminated with lead due, in part, to the ASARCO El Paso plant.

I urge you to reconsider the proposed reinstatement of the ASARCO El Paso air quality permit. The potential negative impacts to public health and the environment in southern New Mexico and western Texas will be significant. I look forward to working with the State of Texas to protect and improve air quality and the environment in the Paso del Norte region. Please have your staff contact Sarah Cottrell, my Energy & Environmental Policy Advisor, at [sarah.cottrell@state.nm.us](mailto:sarah.cottrell@state.nm.us) or 505-476-2241 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Bill Richardson  
Governor of New Mexico