



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Wednesday, March 18, 2009

**ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS PUSH FOR BETTER REGULATIONS  
TO PROTECT GROUNDWATER FROM EXPLORATORY WELLS**

*SANTA FE, NM* — New Mexico Environmental Law Center, representing its clients Amigos Bravos and Gila Resources Information Project (GRIP), will present testimony to support strengthening New Mexico’s mining exploration permitting regulations in order to protect groundwater from contamination caused by mining exploration wells.

The New Mexico Mining Commission will conduct a public hearing on Monday, March 23, 9 a.m., on a petition for rule changes submitted by the Mining and Minerals Division (MMD) (Petition 08-02). The Law Center’s clients are proposing two revisions to the New Mexico Mining Act regulations in addition to the changes submitted by MMD.

“Our clients think the MMD’s changes are very good, but need to go further,” states Eric Jantz, New Mexico Environmental Law Center staff attorney, “so we proposed two changes to the petition MMD submitted.” The first proposed change would require using bentonite (a kind of clay), rather than cement to plug up exploratory wells once an exploratory well is abandoned. “Currently,” Jantz explains, “wells are filled with cement to seal the well and keep oxygen from mixing with the exposed ore body, but cement degrades over time; especially when in contact with water. When that happens, toxic minerals and clean groundwater can mix and contamination can easily occur.”

The second proposal would change how companies estimate the amount of money they need to have available to clean up their exploration operations in the event a company goes bankrupt before it can conduct clean up itself. The proposed change would prevent companies from underestimating restoration costs.

The New Mexico Environmental Law Center and its clients are up against the mining industry’s complaint of higher operation costs these changes will bring if adopted, and the threat of lost business. Jantz responds that “in a state as arid as ours, the cost of protecting the quality of our groundwater is far cheaper than the cost of replacing it.”

The public may testify at the hearing in person or by written statement. The written statement can also be submitted prior to the hearing. For more information, please visit the Mining and Minerals website: <http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/MMD/index.htm>

HEARING DETAILS:

- WHAT: New Mexico Mining Commission Public Hearing with testimony from New Mexico Environmental Law Center, Amigos Bravos and Gila Resources Information Project (GRIP)
- WHEN: Monday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009, 9 a.m.
- WHERE: Porter Hall, Wendell Chino Building  
1220 South St. Francis Drive, Santa Fe

[www.nmenvirolaw.org](http://www.nmenvirolaw.org)

*Since 1987, the New Mexico Environmental Law Center has worked every day to protect New Mexico's water, land and air from toxic pollution; and to assist its many and diverse communities protect their environment. The mission of the Law Center is to protect New Mexico's natural environment and communities through legal and policy advocacy, and public education. The New Mexico Environmental Law Center's attorneys have handled over 100 critical cases in low-income and minority communities fighting pollution and environmental degradation. The Law Center charges few, if any, fees to its clients, most of whom are from Hispanic and Native American communities. Membership and gifts help New Mexico communities protect their natural environment and their health from toxic pollution, the degrading effects of growth and liabilities created by irresponsible mining.*

**INTERVIEWS AND IMAGES ARE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST**

CONTACT:

Juana Colón, Communications and Public Education  
New Mexico Environmental Law Center  
505-989-9022, ext 21  
[jcolon@nmelc.org](mailto:jcolon@nmelc.org)

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