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## **WERC to Begin Phase II of Program to Help Water Utilities Meet New Arsenic Regulations**

A New Mexico State University environmental consortium has received a \$425 thousand grant to help communities select and implement the most cost-efficient and effective technologies to remove arsenic from their public water systems. This grant is the second awarded as part of the Arsenic Partnership Program, established by Congress in 2003 as a response to new Safe Drinking Water Act requirements that lower the acceptable levels of arsenic in drinking water.

WERC: A Consortium for Environmental Education and Technology Development, headquartered at New Mexico State University, is part of the U.S. Department of Energy partnership that also includes Sandia National Laboratories and the American Water Works Association Research Foundation (AwwaRF). The primary task of the partnership is to provide domestic and municipal water utilities, particularly those serving small and rural communities, with cost-effective solutions for complying with the new arsenic standards. The new regulations lowered the limits for arsenic, a known carcinogen, from 50 parts-per-billion (ppb) to 10 ppb. It is estimated that more than 2,000 public water systems across the nation will have to implement new processes in order to comply with the new regulation by 2006.

During Phase I of the program WERC developed an economic analysis tool that will be accessible via the Internet. Administrators from public water utilities will be able to enter specific information about their community, such as population and the number of gallons of water supplied, and their water chemistry properties, such as pH level and arsenic content, into the model. The model will provide them with a comparison of commercially available technologies and the relative cost of each in their particular community.

AwwaRF is conducting bench-scale testing of new arsenic removal technologies. Those that show promise will be pilot tested by Sandia National Laboratories. Sandia is currently in the process of identifying



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communities in New Mexico where they will deploy pilot units for field tests. During Phase II, the data derived from these tests will be added to the computerized economic analysis model. As new technologies emerge and are tested, information will be incorporated into the model. Once the model has been fully developed, it will be tested in Michigan, Wisconsin, Arizona and California. It will then be made available worldwide at no cost to users.

U.S. Senator Pete Domenici who introduced legislation to exempt nonprofit small public water systems from certain drinking water standards this past July said, “The 2006 effective date of EPA arsenic regulations is right around the corner, but current estimates show that in New Mexico alone, it will cost between \$370 and \$440 million in capital outlays plus \$18 million per year in operation costs just to meet the standard. The federal government cannot mandate these standards and then hang our small and rural communities out to dry when it comes to picking up the tab.”

The WERC consortium is comprised of New Mexico State University, the University of New Mexico, the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, Diné College and Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories. WERC’s mission is to develop human resources and technologies that assist various levels of government and private sector companies in addressing environmental issues. For more information about WERC, visit [www.werc.net](http://www.werc.net) or call 505-646-2038.

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