

## House Bill 92 ensures safe drinking water remains a priority in New Mexico

Written by By Ramon Lucero Rural Community Assistance Corporation  
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In New Mexico, approximately 1.9 million people rely on public water systems to provide a safe and reliable supply of drinking water to our homes and businesses. But how do we know if our community drinking water supply is safe to drink? The simple answer is that our drinking water supply is tested regularly to ensure that it complies with state and federal regulatory standards. Without regular testing, local drinking water utilities would not learn of a known or potential health risk in a timely manner.

Water analysis at certified laboratories can often cost several thousand dollars per year for one small community water system. In 1993, the New Mexico Legislature enacted a law that created a fund to cover costs of required drinking water testing. Revenue to the fund comes from public water systems that pay a monthly fee of \$0.03 per 1,000 gallons of water that they produce. The fund is then used to pay for the costly sampling and laboratory analysis of our drinking water supply in New Mexico communities large and small, rural and urban.

This fee has not changed in over 27 years even though the cost of safe drinking water testing has gone up year after year due to inflation and increased sampling requirements that reflect the best available science and treatment technologies. Costs today significantly outweigh revenue for the fifth year in a row, putting the fund on a clear path to insolvency unless the state takes action.

In order to ensure long-term solvency of this important fund, the New Mexico Environment Department worked with sponsors Rep. Doreen Gallegos, D-Doña Ana and Rep. Susan Herrera, D-Embudo to introduce HB 92 during the 2021 Legislative Session. This bill protects the fund, and the public health services it supports, by increasing fees for the Safe Drinking Water Testing Fund from \$0.03 per 1,000 gallons of water produced to \$0.05 per 1,000 gallons of water produced. This equates to about \$0.40 per household per month and would provide the needed revenue to ensure that New Mexico communities and families have access to safe drinking water without passing the full financial burden of water testing to some of our state's smallest water systems.

By enacting this important legislation, NMED will be equipped to continue drinking water sampling and testing for over 90 contaminants at more than 1,000 public water systems throughout our state. In addition, HB 92 will ensure that the fund can support new testing requirements for lead and copper and other emerging contaminants in coming years. For an increase that amounts to less than \$5.00 per household per year, we can ensure that local water systems continue to benefit from this vital program.

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Without this bill, NMED will be forced to reduce the number of contaminants that can be sampled, which shifts more of the water testing burden to the public water systems themselves, including very small systems with limited revenue. This is the primary reason why there is such widespread support for the bill, particularly from the communities that pay the fee.

Ensuring solvency of the Safe Drinking Water Testing Fund will allow for the costs of these samples to be spread across all of our public water systems, which reduces the financial burden for small and rural drinking water supplies.

Please join Rural Community Assistance Corporation, the New Mexico Municipal League, the New Mexico Association of Counties, the New Mexico Rural Water Association, and the New Mexico Environment Department in support of HB 92 to ensure safe drinking water for children, families and communities remains a priority in our state.

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