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THE NAVAJO NATION

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Navajo Nation EPA announces significant reductions in SO₂ emissions at Four Corners Power Plant

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency has announced significant reductions of sulfur dioxide emissions from the Four Corners Power Plant in Nenahnezad, N.M.

According to reports submitted to the Navajo EPA and U.S. EPA, there is 22,540 fewer tons of SO₂ coming from the stacks at the power plant compared to emissions reported in 2003. At that time, the Arizona Public Service Co. reported annual emissions at 35,094 tons. Its latest reports show that the 2005 annual emissions level was 12,554 tons.

This significant improvement in air quality in the San Juan Basin and in the New Mexico part of the Navajo Nation is directly related to improved relations and cooperation between the Navajo EPA and APS, which manages the Four Corners plant, said Stephen B. Etsitty, executive director of the Navajo Nation EPA.



One year ago Thursday, APS and the Salt River Project, manager of the Navajo Generating Station in LeChee, Ariz., signed a Voluntary Compliance Agreement to allow Navajo EPA to assume regulatory authority over air quality issues for the power plants. In March 2006, U.S. EPA delegated its authority to the Navajo Nation to administer the Operating Permit Program for Four Corners plant and Navajo Generating Station.

Signing the Voluntary Compliance Agreement one year ago with Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., is SRP President William P. Shrader and APS Vice President of Fossil Generation John Denman. Behind them in red shirt is Navajo Nation EPA Director Stephen B. Etsitty.

“Since the first year of our administration, I asked Stephen to find a way to improve our relationships with these major players in the energy industry and it’s been done,” Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., said. “He’s achieved this with great success, and our Nation’s government is making great progress to address the Navajo community’s concerns about poor air quality, and that’s the way it should be.”

President Shirley said plans to institute voluntary compliance to reduce SO₂ will soon be proposed in a Federal Implementation Plan by the U.S. EPA, which is expected to become the new standard at the Four Corners plant.

Mr. Etsitty said this is highly anticipated by other groups off of the Navajo Nation that are concerned about air quality in the Four Corners area. He said he encourages Navajo citizens to continue to raise their concerns regarding the protection of Navajoland and the health of its people, and to work with the Navajo EPA to use its laws and regulations for the Nation’s benefit.

To accomplish the goal for SO₂ removal, APS conducted a two-year study of potential physical and chemical improvements in its pollution control equipment and processes. As a result, the Four Corners plant was able to achieve 88 percent SO₂ removal on an annual average.

In a joint report between Navajo EPA and APS last year to the Navajo Nation Council’s Resources Committee, the Navajo EPA also stressed that the goal continually be revisited to eventually achieve a 90 percent removal level.

In 2002, a proposed agreement reached by APS, several environmental groups and federal land managers accepted an 85 percent removal level.

“EPA Region 9 believes there is unanimous support from the stakeholders that were involved in developing this approach for early reductions to meet FCPP’s SO₂ requirements under the Regional Haze program,” wrote Deborah Jordan, director of the Air & Toxics Division for the U.S. EPA-Region 9, in an April 26, 2006, letter to Navajo EPA.

Navajo EPA will continue to do its part to permit and regulate major source facilities, reduce emissions of hazardous air pollutants, and improve air quality in the Four Corners region, Mr. Etsitty said. Other pollutants such as nitrogen oxides, ozone, and mercury from the Four Corners plant will continue to be emitted for some time. However, with successful and immediate reductions of SO₂, there is good basis to see what can be done to achieve emission reductions for the other air pollutants in the near term, he said.

Many of the other sources of air pollution in the Four Corners area are being addressed by other agencies, such as emissions from the oil and gas industry in New Mexico and Colorado, he said. Navajo EPA stands ready to work with the neighboring states and federal land managers to ensure environmental protection and public health, as the Navajo Nation continues to develop its lands and resources, he said.

For more information about the Navajo Nation EPA Air Quality Control and the Operating Permit Programs, visit the NNEPA website at www.navajonationepa.org; or contact Charlene Nelson, Environmental Program Supervisor, at (928) 729-4246.

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ADDITIONAL SOURCES

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