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ADEQ Director Owens Announces Draft Water Quality Permits for Freeport-McMoran and BHP Mining Operations in Gila County

PHOENIX (Sept. 4, 2008) – Arizona Department of Environmental Quality Director Steve Owens announced today that the department has released three draft permits for mining operations in Gila County, which, if adopted, will enable the mines to operate effectively while protecting groundwater in the area.

The permits, known as Aquifer Protection Permits (APPs), are proposed for (i) the Freeport-McMoRan Miami, Inc. open-pit, porphyry-copper mining and smelting operation; (ii) the BHP Copper Miami Unit, a 700-acre site that produces refined copper from leaching operations; and (iii) the BHP Copper Cities Unit, which consists of two pits, two main leach dumps, waste rock piles, and a variety of impoundments and structures used to transport and or impound mining-process water and stormwater.

The public comment period for the permits ends Oct. 9. Comments should be sent to Barry Rechterovich, ADEQ, Groundwater Section, 1110 West Washington Street, MC5415B-3, Phoenix, AZ 85007.

The three APPs require operational monitoring at each site to ensure the facilities are inspected and maintained to meet Best Available Demonstrated Control Technology standards. Groundwater monitoring is required to ensure that aquifer water quality standards are met.

"These are strong water quality permits that will protect groundwater in the area, and will bring these historic mining operations into compliance with current regulations," Director Owens said. "These permits will safeguard precious water resources while also protecting much-needed jobs in Gila County."

Owens noted that ADEQ issued a similarly strong permit for BHP Copper's Pinto Valley Mine in Miami last year.

The operations are located within the Pinal Creek Water Quality Assurance Revolving Fund (WQARF) site but the facilities are not part of WQARF cleanup operations. Cleanup activities for the affected areas will continue under the WQARF program.