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ADEQ Director Owens Announces Cleanup at Illegal Border Crossings in Yuma

PHOENIX (Sept. 15, 2008) -- Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) Director Steve Owens announced today that ADEQ will participate in a cleanup on Saturday, Sept. 20 in Yuma to remove waste discarded during illegal border crossings along the Colorado River.

ADEQ is participating in the cleanup as part of its Undocumented Migrant (UDM) Waste Project, through the department's Office of Border Environmental Protection. In addition to providing logistical support, cleaning equipment and volunteers for the cleanups, ADEQ has worked with state, local, and Cocopah Tribe officials and community groups to organize the cleanup.

An estimated 20 to 30 tons of water bottles, food containers, plastic bags and other waste is expected to be cleaned up. The waste also includes tires, oil, and construction materials. The waste gathered by volunteers will be moved to a landfill in Yuma.

"The trashing of the desert by border crossers is a huge problem," Director Owens said. "We have been working with officials at the federal and local levels, as well as community groups, to develop a strategy for addressing this enormous issue and organizing cleanups of waste that has been left in the desert."

In addition to its UDM Waste Project, ADEQ has a broader, ongoing effort to address the overall problem of illegal dumping throughout Arizona. The agency has established a program to work with local officials to prevent illegal dumping and clean up illegal dump sites across the state.

"Dealing with the problem of illegal dumping is a priority," Owens said. "Illegal dumping poses a serious threat to public health and the environment, as well as to the well being of communities. We are committed to working with local leaders to address this major problem in our state."