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Asbestos Cleanup in Holbrook Expected to be Completed This Week

PHOENIX (Oct. 1) – Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) Director Steve Owens said today that the cleanup of asbestos-containing debris from a demolished Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) school dormitory in Holbrook is expected to be completed by the end of this week.

In late August ADEQ was alerted by a subcontractor on the project that the demolition debris contained asbestos material. ADEQ inspected the demolition site, located at 1100 W. Buffalo Street near Holbrook High School, which consisted of five piles of debris, each roughly 10-12 feet high and 20-30 feet wide. Tests conducted by ADEQ confirmed that the debris contained asbestos. ADEQ also determined that the contractor, Gerald A. Martin Ltd of Albuquerque, N.M., had failed to comply with regulations requiring notification, containment and disposal of asbestos material.

On August 29 ADEQ ordered the contractor to immediately take steps to keep the asbestos debris wet to prevent students and residents in the area from being exposed to friable asbestos emissions from the site. ADEQ also ordered the contractor to remove the asbestos and ensure that it be properly disposed of at the closest asbestos certified disposal site, located near Joseph City.

After receiving the order, the contractor advised ADEQ that it would comply with the order and hired an asbestos contractor to properly handle the asbestos material and remove it to the Joseph City landfill. As a result of ADEQ's order, the cleanup of the asbestos debris should be completed by the end of this week, assuming no unexpected delays.

“As soon as we learned of this problem, we took action to investigate the site and protect the community from exposure to the asbestos,” Director Owens said. “There is no excuse for the contractor's failure to comply with the requirements of the law, and this cleanup could have – and should have – been completed much sooner. We are hopeful, however, that this cleanup will finally be completed this week and that any risk to the community will be removed once and for all.”

Director Owens said the agency will determine whether to take enforcement action against the contractor after the cleanup is finished. The contractor is subject to potential penalties of up to \$10,000 per day for each violation of the asbestos regulations since the demolition began.