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ADEQ Director Owens Announces Waste Cleanup from Illegal Border Crossings in Douglas Area of Cochise County

PHOENIX (Dec. 31, 2008) -- Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) Director Steve Owens announced today that ADEQ has organized a cleanup on Thursday, Jan. 8 northeast of Douglas near U.S. Highway 80 to remove waste discarded by undocumented migrants on trails across ranch land in the area.

ADEQ is participating in the cleanup, which will be conducted from 10 a.m. throughout the day in the vicinity of milepost marker 383 of U.S. 80, as part of its Undocumented Migrant (UDM) Waste Project, through the department's Office of Border Environmental Protection. Volunteer groups and non-governmental organizations in the Douglas and Agua Prieta, Sonora, area along with area students, will join ADEQ in the cleanup.

"The trashing of the desert by border crossers is a huge problem," Director Owens said. "We have been working with officials at the state, 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."

Three cleanups earlier this year organized by ADEQ in the Yuma area, along the Santa Cruz River north of Nogales and in the Arivaca area produced about 110 tons of trash that was hauled out of sensitive riparian and hunting areas.

This is the first of what is expected to be a series of cleanups in the Douglas area near the border in 2009.

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."