Written by Gallupsun Staff
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Forty years after the "worst accident" in the United States involving radioactive material occurred in Church Rock, New Mexico on July 16, 1979 when approximately 94 million gallons of radioactive waste that was held in unlined evaporation ponds at the United Nuclear Corporation's (UNC) mill site was released into the Rio Puerco River and flowed through nearby communities and on through the state of Arizona westward, UNC wants to begin a clean up effort that will allow disposal of Northeast Church Rock (NECR) mine waste that is estimated at approximately 1,000,000 cubic yards.

On March 19 and 21, 2019 the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) held two Public Environmental Scoping Meetings for the proposal to dispose of the CRNE mine waste and received public comments from the citizenry of Gallup and surrounding Navajo communities. At both meetings the audience was at capacity in the Gallup Community Service Center and the verbal input was from former uranium workers, health experts, technical support, Navajo medicine people and activists with all of the comments indicating more community outreach was needed before anything begins. Not one person spoke in favor of the NRC's plan.

The NRC is reviewing a license application with a request to amend its Source Material License (No. SUA-1475) for the former Church Rock Mill and Tailings Site under specific requirements in Title 10 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 40, Domestic Licensing of Source Material. The former 902-acre Church Rock Uranium Mill Site and 125-acre NECR Mine Site are listed in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's "Superfund" designation in the National Priority List and the potential environmental impacts of the proposed action is being documented in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which requires public comments on the scope and content of this EIS.

There were no official representatives from the City of Gallup and McKinley County although there are resolutions from both entities that prohibit the transportation of high-level radioactive waste through the city and county; one individual from the Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency spoke gave his comments in both Navajo and English, a much needed aspect since most of the UNC activities will directly impact the Navajo citizens that live near the waste materials and will have to move before any actions begins.

Although the public meetings are over and none are further scheduled, written comments are allowed to be submitted to the NRC until April 19th through its website. According to a Federal Register notice published Feb. 8, 2019 in which the NRC announced its intention to prepare an environmental impact statement on the proposed waste transfer; interested individuals must

refer to Docket ID NRC-2019-0026, when contacting the NRC about the availability of information regarding this document.

On April 22, 2019, there will be a "Nuclear Nation Film Festival" that will be held at the El Morro Theater located at 207 West Coal Avenue in Gallup, New Mexico with six films showing beginning at 3:00 thru 9:30 pm along with six expert panelists available to answer questions about the uranium legacy on the Navajo Nation.

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