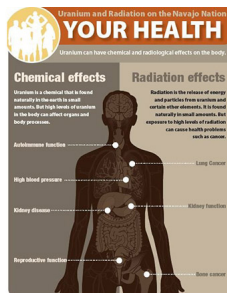


Educational spots shine light on uranium contamination

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
Friday, 30 December 2022 06:48



On a beautiful day in the Four Corners, it's easy to forget the invisible legacy of decades of uranium mining. Yet the industry was once concentrated here, and the Navajo Reservation is still peppered with exposed tailings that can shift with the wind and uranium mines that were never capped – a deadly reminder of the “Atomic Age” industry. Many of the companies that did the mining went bankrupt or otherwise evaded responsibility for cleanup.

“We need cleanup and reparations for people who have died or had to relocate from their homelands,” Anna Rondon, Project Director for New Mexico Social Justice & Equity Institute, said. “Compare it to how Three-Mile Island was handled. Because they were white people, they got more immediate assistance in terms of health care and studies of thyroid cancer in the five counties around Three-Mile Island.”

Around the Four Corners, results of exposure are still visible in health consequences, which can include organ failure, cancers and birth defects. Generations born after the mines closed may not be aware of the lingering effects, and activists want to change that.

“We want to target the younger generation with education,” Rondon said. “We like to work with the young people and think of ways to continuously educate the public. [The government] has basically neglected their duty to the citizens of New Mexico and throughout the U.S.”

To spread the word, NMSJEI teamed up with Beyond Nuclear and Gender + Radiation Impact Project to create the *Radiate The Truth* series of digital assets. They include infographics and radio scripts in both English and Diné, offered for publication or broadcast as public service announcements. They have been posted on Instagram and TikTok, and they are available on a dedicated website, <https://beyondnuclear.org/uranium-mine-waste-info/>.

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“The timing is urgent, the urgency to educate people,” Rondon said. “The war in Ukraine is pressuring European countries that have phased out nuclear power plants to restart their nuclear power plants. That has reinvigorated demand for uranium, including new companies scouting the area.”

That worries Rondon. Among other issues, none of the nine candidates for the state Public Regulation Commission, which oversees energy development, are from northwest New Mexico; most are from Albuquerque or Santa Fe. Activists filed a lawsuit to challenge the list, but it was dismissed as untimely.

Rondon and her colleagues hope the PSAs will raise awareness and spur action.

“We have to get enough people mad enough to change things. Why does it always have to be Indigenous people to correct things that are being done in a wrong way?” she questioned. “We were given the yellow corn pollen. That’s what we chose, to use the corn pollen path. [Time has] exposed the monsters of illnesses and social relocation that have devoured parts of our community. We are on the path for healing so we need to radiate the truth.”

By Holly J. Wagner
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