



25th Navajo Nation Council

# 25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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## **Resources and Development Committee calls on US EPA to provide further public outreach on Eastern Agency Abandon Uranium Mine remediation**



**The RDC told the US EPA that further public outreach needs to be done regarding remediation alternatives for abandoned uranium mines located in the Eastern Navajo Agency.**

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – On Monday, the Resources and Development Committee (RDC) received a report from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 9 regarding public outreach efforts addressing Abandoned Uranium Mine (AUM) remediation in the Eastern Navajo Agency.

Director of Superfund and Emergency Management Division, US EPA Region 9, Michael Montgomery reported that the Agency's public comment period solicited responses from 26 Navajo tribal members, 19 of which identified with AUM-impacted communities.

"Today, the US EPA provided an update on their public comment period outreach. This report is not considered a government-to-government consultation," RDC Chair Brenda Jesus (Oaksprings, St. Michaels) clarified. "I feel the voice of the Navajo Nation is not being heard due to the low numbers exemplified in the report. There is still a list of items that need to be addressed."

The US EPA Region 9's public comment period and outreach efforts were inclusive of the seven AUMs located in the Eastern Navajo Agency. The Mariano Lake Mine has three mine sites, the Mac and Black Jack Mines near Smith Lake have two mine sites, and Ruby Mines, also near Smith Lake, have two mine sites.

The US EPA's remediation alternatives for these sites include taking no action, consolidating

and covering in place, consolidating multiple sites within one location, creating a regional repository at the site, disposing of the material off the Navajo Nation but within 100 miles of the location, and disposing of the hazardous material off the Nation but at an existing licensed facility.

For the Mariano Lake Mine, the US EPA recommended that the hazardous waste be moved to a regional repository located at the Mac No. 1 mine site. The area is currently restricted and fenced off. For the Mac and Black Jack Mines, the agency recommended that the waste be moved to a regional repository at the Mac No. 1 mine site, then to consolidate and close Black Jack No. 1 in place. Regarding the Ruby Mines, the agency recommended consolidating and capping the hazardous waste in place at each mine site.

Public comments solicited by the US EPA indicated that for all mine sites, community members chose to have the hazardous waste transported from the mine site location and disposed of off the Navajo Nation.

Council Delegate Otto Tso (To' Nanees Dizi) thanked the agency for taking their public outreach to the Eastern Navajo Agency communities. Several RDC members questioned if the presentations were translated into the Navajo language to clarify the mission of the agency.

"I'm glad you're taking the communities suggestions into consideration. This decision needs to come from the people living near the impacted sites. We need to know that fluent Navajo speakers assisted your outreach to provide proper translation," Delegate Tso said.

Delegate Danny Simpson (Becenti, Lake Valley, Nahodishgish, Standing Rock, Whiterock, Huerfano, Nageezi, Crownpoint) brought up the situation of lost comment cards and establishing third party right-of-way easement for roads that will be created in remediation efforts.

US EPA Section Manager for Region 9, Jacob Phipps, confirmed that comment cards were lost which caused the agency to extend the comment period. Phipps also noted that the US EPA is seeking third party easement for roads.

Delegate Rickie Nez (T'iistoh Sikaad, Nenahnezad, Upper Fruitland, Tse' Daa' Kaan, Newcomb, San Juan) asked if the US EPA is considering High-Pressure Slurry Ablation Treatability as a remediation alternative and asked Navajo Nation EPA Director Stephen Etsitty to elaborate on inclusion of this process.

"The EPA approved and verified the High-Pressure Slurry Ablation Treatability final study results in December 2023. Since then, we've been working with the Department of Environmental Science and Assessment to strategize how to get this technology integrated into this process," Etsitty said.

RDC Chair Jesus agreed that EPA approved remediation technology must be considered when protecting the safety of Navajo communities from hazardous materials.

"Our people didn't ask to be left with AUMs, we inherited this issue. We're voicing our need to get more federal dollars to bring clean closure in remediation," Chair Jesus said. "The RDC is open to further collaboration and communication."

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