

Uranium Workers' Day in Santa Fe Friday

By Kathy Helms
Diné Bureau
navajo1@gallupindependent.com

WINDOW ROCK — The Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment will host Uranium Workers' Day on Friday at the Roundhouse in Santa Fe to raise concerns about the continuing health and environmental effects from historic uranium mining.

A press conference is set for 9:30 a.m. in the Rotunda with former uranium workers and community members impacted by the Cold War legacy. Educational displays and information will be available in the East Hall of the Rotunda. Twenty-three organizations have cosponsored the day.

Rep. Doreen Johnson has introduced House Memorial 70 in the New Mexico Legislature calling for expanding compen-

sation for all uranium workers through proposed amendments to the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act. Rep. George Louis will be introducing a Memorial requesting a baseline health study in impacted communities, according to Susan Gordan, coordinator for MASE.

Many failed attempts

Idaho Sen. Mike Crapo and Montana Sen. Conrad Burns first introduced legislation to expand RECA on Dec. 16, 2005. New Mexico's congressional delegation has been reintroducing bills to amend RECA since at least 2010 with no success.

It would cost an estimated \$17 billion to fund the RECA amendments through the first year.

The first week of February, New Mexico Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich renewed their efforts to expand RECA compensation for those exposed to radiation while working in uranium mines or living downwind from atomic weapons tests by cosponsoring S.B. 331. U.S. Rep. Ben Ray Lujan Jr. introduced companion legislation Feb. 13 in the House.

Lujan said congressional leaders will continue to push the RECA amendments forward until all who are suffering from the impacts of uranium mining and nuclear testing during the Cold War are compensated.

Among the provisions in the RECA Amendments of 2015 are much needed changes that would build upon previous RECA legislation by further widening qualifications for compensation for radiation exposure; qualifying post 1971 uranium workers for compensation; and expanding the downwind exposure area to include Colorado, Idaho, Montana, and New Mexico, as well

as any county in Arizona, Nevada, or Utah, which has been shown to be impacted by downwind contamination.

Warriors speak out

Among the speakers at Friday's event include Linda Evers of Milan, who helped organize the Post '71 Uranium Workers Committee. Evers has been working for decades to gain fair compensation for uranium workers who are not covered under the current version of RECA.

Also on the agenda are Larry King, who volunteers with Eastern Navajo Diné Against Uranium Mining. King was working for United Nuclear Corp. in July 1979 when the largest uranium tailings spill in the United States breached an earthen dam in Churchrock, spilling millions of gallons of radioactive tailings solution.

Edith Hood, a resident of the Red Water Pond Road community on the Navajo Nation, also is a guest speaker. Hood is a former mine worker and cancer survivor who lives between two massive uranium tailings piles that continue to contaminate her community.

Jordan Johnson, coordinator for McKinley Community Place Matters, also will be on hand. Johnson has been working with community health agencies to study the long-term health impacts for exposure to uranium.

"Research has documented that exposure to dust, gases, exhaust, and fumes as well as lack of protective clothing and safety measures such as miners drinking water from the mine ceilings or eating their lunches while work, can result in non-malignant and malignant respiratory diseases," Johnson said. "The disastrous effects of uranium mining and milling and health impacts from working in the mine are stressors for individuals and families."

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