



THE NAVAJO NATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JANUARY 19, 2017

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THE NAVAJO NATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AND EPA ENTER INTO SETTLEMENT WITH FREEPORT-MCMORAN SUBSIDIARIES FOR CLEANUP OF 94 ABANDONED URANIUM MINES

WINDOW ROCK - The Navajo Nation and the United States have entered into a settlement agreement with Cyprus Amax Minerals Company and Western Nuclear, Inc., two affiliated subsidiaries of Freeport-McMoRan, Inc., for the cleanup of 94 abandoned uranium mines located on the Navajo Nation. Of those mines, 77 are Freeport mines and 17 are nearby mines that Freeport has agreed to clean up at the same time.

“We appreciate the efforts of mining companies like Freeport that are coming forth to clean up the uranium contamination that they have caused on the Navajo Nation,” said Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye. “Freeport has committed to clean up more mines than that which will be addressed in the TRONOX lawsuit. The Navajo Nation will work very closely with Freeport to make sure that the cleanup is done properly.”

This settlement, when combined with prior settlements addressing Kerr-McGee mines and “orphan” mines (those where there are no longer any viable responsible parties), will result in cleanup taking place at over one quarter of the 523 abandoned uranium mines on the Navajo Nation. In addition, under one of the orphan mine settlements, initial site investigations will begin at 30 more abandoned uranium mines, expanding at least the beginning of the cleanup process to more than one third of all the abandoned uranium mines.

“Generations of our tribal members have lived with the legacy of contaminated water sources, cancer, respiratory illnesses, terminal diseases, and non-compensation by the federal government and private industries that mined the toxic material,” said Vice President Jonathan Nez. “There is still much more work to be done when it comes to cleaning up the legacy of uranium mining.”

The abandoned mines are a legacy of Cold War efforts to develop nuclear power and weapons, followed by mining to support commercial nuclear power. Many companies mined

uranium on Navajo Nation land, beginning in 1944 at the federal government’s initiative and lasting until 1986, when the last uranium mine was shut down. Radioactive waste piles containing overburden, waste rock, and low-grade uranium ore left over from mining activities remain at the mine sites. Many Navajo people worked in and near the mines and many still live and work near the mine sites.

“The effects of uranium mining on the Navajo Nation have been longstanding, widespread, and pervasive,” said Ethel Branch, Navajo Nation Attorney General. “These sites have plagued the Nation for decades, and we are very glad to see such progress being made to address this troubling legacy.” In light of its devastating uranium legacy, the Navajo Nation placed a moratorium on uranium mining in 2005.

This settlement is perhaps the most significant step to date in addressing that legacy, based on the sheer number of sites that will be cleaned up. Under the settlement, the two Freeport subsidiaries will perform the work and the federal government will pay approximately half of the costs. The work will be performed subject to oversight by U.S. EPA in collaboration with the Navajo Nation EPA. The cleanup is expected to take 20-25 years and will provide jobs for Navajo companies and individuals.

“It is important that Freeport uses Navajo employees and that they contract with Navajo businesses. We encourage them to use the point system that is being used by the U.S. EPA in utilizing Navajo workers and businesses,” said President Begaye. “This ensures that Navajo companies will utilize higher educational institutions like the Navajo Technical University, University of New Mexico, San Juan Community College and other educational institutions to gain essential training and licensing for Navajo businesses.”

The details of the settlement are contained in a proposed

consent decree, lodged last night in the U.S. District Court for the District of Arizona, including in the "Statement of Work" that is attached to the consent decree. A list of the abandoned uranium mines subject to the settlement is also attached to the consent decree. The proposed consent decree is subject to a 30-day

public comment period and approval by the court. Information about submitting comments is available at: <https://www.justice.gov/enrd/consent-decrees>.

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