



## The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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## Nez-Lizer urge federal EPA to prioritize Navajo contractors in uranium mine clean-up efforts

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer strongly urged federal Environmental Protection Agency officials to prioritize Navajo contractors and businesses in the ongoing uranium mine clean-up efforts during a consultation session on Thursday in Window Rock, Ariz., where federal officials presented a draft of the federal EPA’s 10-year plan to address impacts of uranium contamination on the Navajo Nation. Navajo Nation EPA Executive Director Oliver B. Whaley and Division of Natural Resources Executive Director Dr. Rudy Shebala also participated in the meeting.



**PHOTO:** Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer meeting with U.S. EPA Region 9 officials in Window Rock, Ariz. on Jan. 23, 2020.

Over the last several years, the federal EPA has been awarded approximately \$1.7 billion from several settlements and congressional appropriations for uranium mine clean-up efforts on the Navajo Nation. The federal EPA is steadily using these funds to address the clean-up of 524 abandoned uranium mine sites on and near the Navajo Nation.

“The dollars coming in from the settlements should benefit the Navajo economy by prioritizing Navajo businesses and contractors that are able to conduct mine clean-up work. We have Navajo businesses that can remediate uranium sites while creating more jobs for our Navajo people,” said President Nez.

The proposed 10-year plan builds on the work of two previous five-year plans, 2008-2012 and 2014-2018, which was requested in 2007 by the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and

Government Reform. According to the federal EPA, the proposed 10-year plan makes adjustments based on information gained during the previous five-year plans, and identifies the next steps in addressing the human health and the environmental risks associated with the legacy of uranium mining on the Navajo Nation.

Vice President Lizer stated that the Navajo people have suffered for many years due to the federal government's exploration and production of uranium on the Navajo Nation during the Cold War.

"When American needed Navajo, we provided the resources and now with the clean-up efforts there is an opportunity to heal our communities and our people. Through the use of the settlement funds, we want the federal EPA to support the 'Buy Navajo, Buy Local' initiative by contracting with Navajo entrepreneurs and businesses," stated Vice President Lizer.

President Nez and Vice President Lizer also urged the federal EPA officials to prioritize and address air and water contamination caused by abandoned uranium mines, and to identify solutions to deliver clean water to areas with contaminated water sources. They also called on the federal EPA to establish a field office on the Navajo Nation to improve coordination and communication between the Navajo Nation EPA and federal EPA.

The federal EPA also noted several accomplishments including the completion of surveys of over 1,000 structures, remediation of over 50 structures that were found to pose a health risk, and the removal of contaminated soil from areas outside 18 homesites. President Nez said the remaining sites need to be cleaned up by the federal government even if the federal EPA does not identify the responsible party.

Among several goals for the next 10 years, the federal EPA plans to complete detailed assessments at all 219 sites where EPA has secured funding or work commitment from a potentially responsible party, complete clean-up designs at all sites where all action memos are finalized by 2024, initiate clean-up for all sites where clean-up design is finalized, and continue to involve the communities and tribal leaders in the mine assessment and clean-up process to ensure that the federal EPA understands community concerns and considers community goals in its decision-making process.

The Office of the President and Vice President will continue to coordinate and provide recommendations to the federal EPA prior to the finalization of the 10-year plan.

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