



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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LA Times publishes four-part series, ‘Blighted Homeland,’ about history, legacy of uranium mining on Navajo Nation

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – From Sunday through Wednesday, Nov. 19-22, the Los Angeles Times will publish one of the largest newspaper investigations about the history and legacy of uranium mining on the Navajo Nation ever reported.

Information for “Blighted Homeland,” was gathered over the past two years by LA Times Washington Bureau reporter Judy Pasternak and LA Times photographer Gail Fisher.

The introduction from the series reports that “from 1944 to 1986, 3.9 million tons of uranium ore were dug and blasted from Navajo soil, nearly all of it for America’s atomic arsenal. Navajos inhaled radioactive dust, drank contaminated water and built homes using rock from the mines and mills. Many of the dangers persist to this day.”

Part I, “They took shelter amid the poison,” which runs Sunday, reports on the contamination of the Navajo homeland from uranium mining, how Navajos built homes from the tailings and rock left behind, and the illness and death that resulted.

Monday’s report deals with how water resources were contaminated. Tuesday’s report covers the cleanup efforts, and Wednesday’s report deals with new technology the uranium industry would like to use in its hope to re-introduce uranium development to the Navajo Nation.

Part I of the series was posted online Saturday at:



Uranium ore. A photo from the LA Times four-part series running Nov. 19-22. Photo by Gail Fisher, LA Times

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-navajo-series,0,4515615.special?coll=la-home-headlines>

It opens with the story of Oljato residents Mary and Billy Boy Holiday who bought their hogan from a medicine man in 1967 for \$50, a sheep and a canvas tent. To make it more comfortable, they had a new floor put in. What they didn’t know – what no Navajos knew – was that the material used was radioactive and probably led to the cancer deaths of Mr. Holiday and his nephew years later.

Not until the year 2000 did Mrs. Holiday learn their hogan was dangerous, Ms. Pasternak writes.



*Monument Valley, Utah, where uranium was mined on the Navajo Nation.
Photo by Gail Fisher, LA Times*

“During the Cold War, uranium mines left contaminated waste scattered around the Navajo Nation,” she writes. “Homes built with it silently pulsed with radiation. People developed cancer. And the U.S. did little to help.”

“The U.S. government appealed to both Navajo patriotism and self-interest when it asked the tribe to open its land to uranium exploration in the 1940s,” she continues. “The mining would aid the American war effort and provide jobs, federal officials said.”

Part I of the series reports that “federal scientists knew that mine workers were at heightened risk for developing lung cancer and other serious respiratory diseases in 15 or 20 years. Many did, and eventually their plight drew wide attention. In 1990, Congress offered the former miners an apology and compensation of up to \$150,000 each.”

It also reports that in 1975 when EPA radiation expert Joseph M. Hans, Jr., discovered homes in Cane Valley near the Arizona-Utah line contaminated with gamma radiation and radon, his pleas to have them decontaminated or replaced were ignored while federal officials hurried to clean up contaminated homes for non-Native people in Grand Junction, Colo.

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