



The Navajo Nation
Office of the President and Vice President

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U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission holds off on decision over uranium mine waste transfer

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez commends the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s recent directive, issued through a memorandum to NRC staff members, to hold off on issuing a final Environmental Impact Statement and Safety Evaluation report that are required to allow the U.S. EPA to transfer and store uranium contaminated soil from the Northeast Church Rock Mine Site to a proposed site located only one-mile away.

Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez strongly opposes the transfer and storage of the contaminated waste at the proposed site that is adjacent to the Navajo Nation boundary. For many years, the contamination has caused devastating health and environmental impacts for Navajo people residing in the Redwater Pond Road Community, located within the Church Rock Chapter on the Navajo Nation.



PHOTO: Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez at Redwater Pond Road Community meeting on April 22, 2022.

On April 22, the Nuclear Regulatory Commissioners traveled to the Redwater Pond Road Community to hear directly from Navajo residents who shared firsthand accounts of the traumatizing health and livelihood experiences caused by the mines. President Nez and Navajo Nation EPA Executive Director Valinda Shirley also spoke during the meetings and offered their support for the residents.

“The directive from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission is a strong indication that they will reconsider and hopefully not allow the uranium mine waste to be stored just down the road from where our people live, the people who have suffered so much for many years because of the federal government’s past uranium mining activities. Men worked in these mines without

protection and without being informed of the health risks, mothers and wives washed their clothes which were covered with radioactive dust, and their children played in ponds which were filled with radioactive materials. This is a step in the right direction, but we still need the NRC to issue a formal decision to have the contaminated waste moved far away from the Navajo Nation,” said President Nez.

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chairman Christopher T. Hanson, Commissioner Jeff Baran, and Commissioner David Wright were among the federal officials who made the trip to the Navajo Nation in April, at the request of Redwater Pond Road Community members, President Nez, and the Navajo Nation EPA Director Shirley.

In 1979, the largest radioactive spill in U.S. history occurred at the Church Rock Mill releasing tons of uranium and radioactive waste into the nearby Puerco River, which continues to contaminate water and soil in Navajo communities where families reside including the rural Red Water Pond Road Community.

In October 2021, President Nez met with the Red Water Pond Road Community Association, which was founded in 2006 by Navajo residents residing near the Northeast Church Rock Mines, the Tronox Quivira Mines, and the United Nuclear Corporation Mill Site. The group spoke in opposition to the transfer of the uranium mine waste.

During a formal meeting held in Gallup, N.M. on April 22, federal EPA officials provided an overview of the 2020-2029 plan to address the impacts of uranium contamination on the Navajo Nation. Edith Hood, a member of the Navajo Nation representing the Red Water Pond Road Community Association, spoke about having been diagnosed with cancer due to uranium exposure. She recalled that as a child, she along with family members witnessed the uranium mining in their community, but were never warned about the dangers and health impacts. Hood was one of dozens of elders who voiced their frustration and concerns with the NRC.

The Navajo Nation EPA continues to work with the federal Superfund Program to remediate the 500-plus abandoned uranium mines on the Navajo Nation.

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