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MAIN FOCUS URANIUM MINING IMPACT, CLEANUP IN NAVAJO COMMUNITIES

ALBUQUERQUE - The Natural Resources, Energy and Environmental Law section of the New Mexico Bar Association has named New Mexico Environmental Law Center Staff Attorney Eric Jantz, as "Lawyer of the Year."

Jantz has been with the Law Center for 18 years and focuses mainly on uranium mining impacts and cleanup in the primarily Navajo communities in Cibola and McKinley counties, and on air quality issues in Albuquerque's South Valley. He has worked with front-line communities to prevent re-starting uranium mining on Mt. Taylor and worked closely with McKinley County residents to demand that the County Commission approve a moratorium on new uranium mining, while a study is completed on the disparate impacts of past and possible future mining on the environment and public health.

In Albuquerque's valley neighborhoods, he has worked for many years with communities to force the City of Albuquerque and the City-County Air Quality Board to analyze the cumulative impact from the high density of industrial facilities scattered among long-established neighborhoods when weighing approval of new air quality permits.

Advancing community interests also involves advancing civil and human rights. On behalf of

clients in Albuquerque's valley, he filed a Title VI complaint under the federal Civil Rights Act over disparate impacts of air quality permitting activities on environmental justice communities. He filed a petition with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on behalf of Eastern Navajo Diné Against Uranium Mining asking the Commission to investigate human rights violations by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the U.S. government when they licensed new uranium mines in Crownpoint and Churchrock, and a report with the United Nations Human Rights Committee on behalf of the Red Water Pond Road community charging the U.S. government with violating the human rights of minority and indigenous populations affected by decades of uranium mining and milling.

"I'm honored to receive this reward, particularly because this is the first time the award has been given to a lawyer who works with environmental justice communities," Jantz said.

The stated purposes of the NREEL Section of the N. M. Bar Association are to provide "information and dialogue concerning issues affecting ... the environment, and to provid[e] the highest possible quality of legal services to New Mexicans."

Successful Lawyer of the Year nominees have "superior knowledge of the substantive legal area in which they practice"; contribute in significant ways to natural resources, energy, or environmental law in New Mexico; advance the legal profession in NREEL's areas through assistance to environmental lawyers and law students; "[d]emonstrat[e] innovative thinking"; and [s]upport the public interest and [d]emonstrate outstanding community contributions."

Doug Meiklejohn, executive director and founder of the Law Center, said, "As one of the few nonprofit environmental law firms in the country with an environmental justice mission, we almost always go up against deep-pocketed corporate polluters with the resources to hire teams of lawyers and experts. The fact that we are so often able to prevail is because we have lawyers like Eric working with New Mexico's diverse low-income environmental justice communities to protect our state's precious air, land and water."