

There's still time for public comments on nuclear clean-up

Editor,

In 1979, two incidents involving the nuclear industry and radioactive material took place in America and 40 years later, the communities are still waiting for an adequate response from the responsible parties and the federal government.

On March 28, 1979 the Unit 2 reactor of the Three Mile Island commercial nuclear power plant experienced a failure in the secondary, non-nuclear section of the plant and one of two reactors on the site, partially melted down. Most people were sound asleep when the reactor accident began about 4 am on Wednesday, March 28, 1979.

The second catastrophe took place in the nearby community of Church Rock (NM) in the vicinity of what is known as the Red Water Pond Road community on July 16, 1979 when approximately 94 million gallons of radioactive waste that was held in unlined evaporation ponds at the United Nuclear Corporation's (UNC) mill site, was released into the Rio Puerco River and flowed through nearby communities and on through the state of Arizona westward.

Today, forty years after the "worst accident" in the United States involving radioactive material occurred, UNC wants to begin a clean-up effort that will allow disposal of Northeast Church Rock (NECR) mine waste that is estimated at approximately 1,000,000 cubic yards.

In preparation for the extensive clean-up project, on March 19 and 21, 2019, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) held two Public Environmental Scoping Meetings for the proposal to dispose of the NECR mine waste and received public comments from the citizenry of Gallup and surrounding Navajo communities. At both meetings the audience was at capacity in the Gallup Community Service Center and the verbal input was from former uranium workers, health experts, technical support, Navajo medicine people and activists with all of the comments indicating more community outreach was needed before anything begins. Not one person spoke in favor of the NRC's plan.

Nuclear Nation Film Festival coming up

Written by Gallupsun Staff
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The NRC is currently reviewing a UNC license application with a request to amend its Source Material License (No. SUA-1475) for the former Church Rock Mill and Tailings Site under specific requirements in Title 10 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 40, Domestic Licensing of Source Material.

The former 902-acre Church Rock Uranium Mill Site and 125-acre NECR Mine Site are listed in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's "Superfund" designation in the National Priority List and the potential environmental impacts of the proposed action is being documented in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) by the NRC which requires public comments on the scope and content of this EIS.

Although the public meetings are over and none are further scheduled, written comments are allowed to be submitted to the NRC until April 19th through its website. According to a Federal Register notice published Feb. 8 in which the NRC announced its intention to prepare an environmental impact statement on the proposed waste transfer; interested individuals must refer to Docket ID NRC-2019-0026, when contacting the NRC about the availability of information regarding this document.

On April 22, "Earth Day" 2019 there will be a Free "Nuclear Nation Film Festival" that will be held at the El Morro Theatre located at 207 West Coal Avenue in Gallup, New Mexico with six films showing beginning at 3 pm through 9:30 pm along with six expert panelists available to answer questions about the uranium legacy on the Navajo Nation.

The Navajo Nation Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Department will have an information table set up. We are also recognizing the Three Mile Island victims in solidarity with the communities that were impacted with the March 28, 1979 failure of the Unit 2 Nuclear Reactor. We will also commemorate the communities that were impacted by the worst radioactive "accident" in the United States on July 16, 1979 in Church Rock.

Mervyn Tilden
Church Rock, N.M.