

Letter to the Editor,

Written by Gallupsun Staff
Friday, 26 July 2019 02:45

July 16, 2019 marked the 40th year since the worst radioactive “accident” in United States history which happened at the United Nuclear Corporation’s Northeast Church Rock, N.M. uranium mine site on July 16, 1979 when over 1,100 tons of solid radioactive mill waste and more than 94 million gallons of acidic radioactive uranium tailings spilled into the Rio Puerco River and flowed down stream through Gallup, N.M. and 14 Navajo communities into Arizona.

To date, there has been no reclamation or no studies on the impacts on local water systems and People’s health or how far the deadly contamination went. UNC was never held accountable and sold its interests to General Electric.

Over 200 people participated in the 40 Year Commemoration Walk on July 13th and throughout the day, speakers shared their testimonies, gave presentations and heard from representatives, from Senator Tom Udall, the Navajo Nation Diné Uranium Remediation Advisory Commission, Southwest Information and Research Center, the New Mexico Environmental Law Center and Advocates. On July 14, over 120 attended the Nuclear Nation Film Showing held at the El Morro Theatre.

Sadly, at the 40 Year Commemoration of the Church Rock Spill, held on July 13 and 14, no one from the Office of the Navajo Nation President and Vice-President and the Speaker of the Navajo Nation Council or any of the 24 NNC Delegates came out to join the Community of Red Water Pond Road. The site remains on a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency “Superfund” site on the National Priority List and with Andrew Wheeler, a former Coal lobbyist as the Director appointed by Donald Trump, the prospects for clean up anytime soon are bleak.

Concerning the question of the region’s sole source of drinking water, the Westwater Canyon Aquifer, the legal battle continues as the aquifer supplies water to 15,000 people in this arid region. A regional organization, Eastern Navajo Diné Against Uranium Mining (ENDAUM), is also concerned about the effects of releases of radioactive materials on people who live in Crownpoint within a mile of a proposed central processing plant. The proposed uranium processing plant, located in the village of Crownpoint near schools, churches, and homes, also poses a risk of air contamination.

In Church Rock, ENDAUM has engaged the services of scientific and legal experts who have been testifying for years about the dangers of the proposed In-situ Leach (ISL) mining in

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hearings before the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. On the Navajo Nation, there are over 500 abandoned uranium mines that have never been reclaimed and many remain exposed to the elements and Navajo residents who reside near the mine sites.

ENDAUM's major technical concern with ISL uranium mining is that no In-Situ Leach uranium mining operation in the United States, has ever restored groundwater to pre-mining conditions. With that in mind, we remain committed to opposing the reactivation of any uranium mining near Crownpoint and Church Rock, N.M. Thank you very much to everyone who came out in solidarity and support.

Mervyn Tilden
Church Rock, NM