

Senate committee to look at impacts of Animas River Spill

Written by By Matthew Reichbach NM Political Report
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The Senate Indian Affairs Committee will hold a hearing on the Gold King Mine spill that dumped waste from a mine into the Animas River.

The spill ended up impacting three states as well as the Navajo Nation.

U.S. Senators Tom Udall, D-N.M., and John McCain, R-Ariz., requested the hearing by the committee. Both sit on the committee and reached out to chairman John Barasso, R-Wyo., and ranking member Jon Tester, D-Mont., through a letter.

The letter that Udall and McCain sent to the committee leadership is available at the bottom of this post, courtesy the Udall office.

“Through our ongoing conversations with leaders of the Navajo Nation, we understand their dissatisfaction with the EPA’s response to the spill, and share their concerns that toxic substances might flow onto their lands and waters,” Udall and McCain said in a joint statement. “Congress has a responsibility to oversee the federal government’s response to this crisis, and the Senate Indian Affairs Committee hearing will ensure that the EPA explains the public health, environmental, and economic costs of the spill, and its remediation plans, as well as addresses other problematic EPA activities involving the Navajo Nation.”

Last week, freelance reporter Tristan Ahtone told New Mexico Political Report about some of what could be “other problematic EPA activities involving the Navajo Nation.”

Ahtone said one issue that is big on the Navajo Nation is over waivers that the EPA was

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reportedly handing out. Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye told the EPA to stop handing out the waivers, according to a report by Ahtone for Al Jazeera America.

Earlier this month, Udall and two other members of New Mexico's congressional delegation joined with members of Colorado's delegation to request federal resources for recovery from the spill.

The spill occurred when a team working for the EPA released water from the abandoned Gold King Mine into a creek. The creek feeds into the Animas River and a sickly orange plume flowed down the river.

Eventually, the estimates of the spill said that 3 million gallons of contaminated water flowed into the river. Since the plume left, levels of heavy metals and other contaminants have been found at pre-spill levels.

McCain received a less than ideal reception in Window Rock, Arizona earlier this week from protesters who oppose mining near Oak Flat, a sacred site for the San Carlos Apache Tribe. McCain was in the Navajo Nation capital where he was confronted by protesters.

McCain was there to speak at a celebration of the Navajo Code Talkers. Visit: **nmpoliticalreport.com**