

Fact Sheet

Uranium Mining and Nuclear Pollution in the Upper Midwestern United States

1. World War II ended with the nuclear bomb and introduced the use of nuclear energy for the production of electricity which caused the price of uranium to rise. Uranium mining in South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, and North Dakota began in the middle of the 1960s. As the economy of the Northern Great Plains states depends primarily on agriculture, when uranium was discovered in the region, many get-rich-quick schemes were adopted. Not only were large mining companies pushing off the tops of bluffs and buttes, but small individual ranchers were also digging in their pastures for the radioactive metal. Mining occurred on both public and private land, although the Great Sioux Nation still maintains a claim to the area through the Fort Laramie Treaties of 1851 and 1868, the March 3rd Act of 1871, Article VI of the US Constitution, and the 1980 Supreme Court decision on the Black Hills. The Great Sioux Nation was never consulted on any of this.

2. In northwestern South Dakota, the Cave Hills area is managed by the US Forest Service. The area currently contains 104 abandoned open-pit uranium mines. Studies by the USFS show that one mine alone has 1,400 milliRhems per hour (mR/hr) of exposed radiation, a level of radiation that is 120,000 times higher than normal background of 100 milliRhems per year (mR/yr)! A private abandoned, open-pit uranium mine about 200 meters from an elementary school in Ludlow, SD, emits 1170 microRems per hour, more than 4 times as much as being emitted from the Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan. This is only one abandoned, open-pit uranium mine in the middle of the United States.

3. Through research by an independent researcher, more than 3,000 open-pit uranium mines and prospects can be found in the four state region. A map from the US Forest Service shows the mines and prospects but not how many. The water runoff from the creeks and rivers near these abandoned uranium mines eventually empty into the Missouri River which empties into the Mississippi River. Research shows uranium is being carried down the Missouri River to the southern, South Dakota border. The costs for research outside of this Region has prohibited going outside the Region.

4. The following agencies are aware of these abandoned uranium mines and prospects: US Forest Service, US Environmental Protection Agency, US Bureau of Land Management, SD Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the US Indian Health Service. Only after public concern about these mines was raised a few years ago did the USFS and the EPA pay for a study in 2006 of the off site effects from only one mine, but

not from the combined effects of all the mines. An effort to clean up that one mine was stopped when the mining company declared bankruptcy. Runoff and dust continue to pour from that mine.

5. More than 4,000 exploratory holes, some large enough for a man to fall into, are found in the southwestern Black Hills with an additional 3,000 holes just 10 miles west of the town of Belle Fourche, SD. These holes go to depths of 600 feet. This exploratory process itself has already contaminated the Regions aquifers with radioactive pollutants. Hundreds of more exploratory holes for uranium are being bored in Wyoming and South Dakota with those states' approval.

6. The US Air Force also used small nuclear power plants in some of their hundreds of remote radar stations and missile silos. No data is available on the current status or disposal of these small nuclear power sources or of their wastes. As the US Air Force is responsible for monitoring these sites, although there is no stopping the radioactive pollution that could contaminate aquifers, this responsibility assists in continuing the funding for Ellsworth Air Force Base, a political convenience.

7. In Wyoming, hundreds of abandoned open-pit uranium mines and prospects can be found in or near the coal in the Powder River Basin. Both Wyoming and North Dakota coal is laced with uranium and its decay products. The coal is shipped to power plants in the Eastern and Western parts of the United States. Radioactive dust and particles are released into the air at the coal fired power plants on the East and West Coasts and often set off the warning systems at nuclear power plants. The same radioactive dust and particles are released into the air that travels across South Dakota and to the South and East in the coal strip mining process by itself.

8. The people in the Northern Great Plains Region have the highest rate of lung cancer in the country according to studies by the Indian Health Service. Although the Center for Disease Control and the World Health Organization were requested to come study the cancer rates in this Region, both agencies have never completed any studies. The CDC said there were not enough people in SD to warrant a study, since SD has less than 1 million people. South Dakota also contains the last majority of people of the Great Sioux Nation.

Conclusion

This Fact Sheet regarding past and planned uranium and coal mining in the Northern Great Plains region should give cause for alarm to all thinking people in the United States. This is the area that has been called "the Bread Basket of the World." For more than forty years, the people of Northern Great Plains and beyond have been subjected to radioactive pollution in the air and water from the hundreds of abandoned open pit uranium mines, processing sites, underground nuclear power stations, and waste dumps.

There needs to be a concerted effort to determine the extent of the radioactive pollution in the environment, and the health damage that has been and is currently being inflicted upon the people of the United States and the world.

It is imperative that a federal bill be passed in Congress appropriating enough funds for the cleanup of **ALL** the abandoned uranium mines in this four State region. This harmful situation must not be placed on the end of the Superfund list of hazardous sites to be addressed in twenty years. Those responsible for this disaster must be held responsible for the consequences, but the cleanup and health concerns need to be addressed first.

The cleanup of all of these abandoned, open-pit mines must begin NOW!

***** **What you can do** *****

1. Contact the President of the United States, Congressional Representatives and Senators by phone (202) 224-3121, through the mail, and email. Ask that they pass a bill for the cleanup of all the abandoned uranium mines and prospects, and underground nuclear sites in the Northern Great Plains Region of South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming as these abandoned mines are affecting the water, air, and food for the entire world.

2. Encourage the use of alternative sources of energy such as wind and solar. Nuclear energy is not the answer and only creates very long term problems for the whole world.

Thank you!

Compiled by Defenders of the Black Hills, PO Box 2003, Rapid City, SD 57709,

A 501(c)3. non-profit corporation.

For more information check out www.defendblackhills.org

May, 2012