

1945 Infant Mortality Tells the Story of Trinity

We are the downwinders of New Mexico, victims of the world's first ever nuclear bomb explosion at the Trinity Site in New Mexico on July 16, 1945. As an added assault on our health, we were also downwind of the Nevada Nuclear Test Site. We ask you to support passage of amendments to the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) which will expand coverage to New Mexico and other forgotten downwinders across the American west and Guam. Currently the RECA only provides payments of restitution to a few counties in Arizona, Nevada, and Utah.

We are three Hispano cousins who have lost more than 50 family members to cancer. In relation to the Trinity bombing, we have endured a sickening spike in infant mortality, as well as highly increased exposures to toxic plutonium that rained down on New Mexico after the bomb was detonated. Now we are fighting for downwinder parity, and ask for your help.

— Bernice Gutierrez, Mary Martinez White, and Paul Pino, Steering Committee of The Tularosa Basin Downwinder's Consortium.

By Bernice Gutierrez, Mary Martinez White, Paul Pino, and Tina Cordova

The Trinity Site is often described as remote and uninhabited, yet there were families living as close as twelve miles from the bomb site and according to census data there were approximately 500,000 people living within a 150-mile radius of Trinity. In addition, 49,579 New Mexicans fought in World War II. New Mexico had the highest rate of military service and the highest proportion of fatalities among all the states in the U.S. Men were being killed on the battlefields while their families were being killed at home in New Mexico.

The bomb was incredibly inefficient and overpacked with 13 pounds of weapons-grade plutonium, but only three pounds of the plutonium was fissioned. The remaining ten pounds ascended some 40,000 feet in the fireball created by the blast, and then fell from the sky blanketing New Mexico. Plutonium, the most dangerous substance known to humankind, has a half-life of more than 24,000 years.

The plutonium contaminated our soil, water, crops, livestock, grazing land, wildlife and people. Our water sources included rain barrels, cisterns, holding ponds, lakes, streams, and ditches. In July people would have been working outside most of the day.

Unknowing, innocent victims were growing their own food, hunting, and working with livestock. Children were playing outside all day. No one was officially warned then, afterwards, or since, of the danger.

Our suffering is obscured on many levels. A heavily footnoted article by Kathleen M. Tucker and Robert Alvarez titled "Trinity: The Most Significant Hazard of the Entire Manhattan Project" in the July 15, 2019 *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, reports a horrendous spike in infant deaths after Trinity. The infant mortality rate for 1945 in New Mexico was 100.8 per 1,000 live births, the highest in the country! Prior to 1945, the infant mortality rate had been on a 10-year decline.

Since the federal government refuses to study the deaths of our babies, we are forced to do it ourselves. We have researched available New Mexico death certificates and church records for 1945 and found that hundreds of babies died in 1945. In one instance, in Santa Rita Catholic church in Carrizozo, forty miles from ground zero, we found a 350% percent spike in infant mortality.

What you can do

Help us shine a light on this hidden history. Support the documentary "First We Bombed New Mexico" by Lois Lipman which is nearing distribution and still needs funds to complete. Please also plan to attend our art exhibit "Trinity, Legacies of Nuclear Testing" in Las Cruces, New Mexico July 15 to September 23, 2023. Stand with us in solidarity as we hold our annual Candlelight Vigil on the evening of July 15, 2023. If you cannot be with us in-person please place a luminaria at your home. As the government ignores us, we fear the upcoming movie, Oppenheimer, will ignore us as well. Through the film's Facebook page, encourage the producers to add a clip of our history after their credit roll. And please encourage everyone to visit our web site at www.trinitydownwinders.com to keep track of our progress, and to make a donation.



Every July, the Tularosa Basin Downwinder's Consortium holds a candlelight vigil to remember the victims of Trinity, the world's first atomic bomb detonation.

Drive for Illegal Uranium Mining in New Mexico; Cleanup Obligations Unfulfilled

By Leona Morgan

Due to the push for climate solutions and the geopolitics currently at work in Ukraine, there is increased interest in producing uranium for both energy and weapons, threatening those living near uranium sites. Regardless of its end use, new or increased uranium mining results in the same death and destruction for frontline communities, with no guarantee of proper cleanup or compensation.

In 2014, the Eastern Navajo Diné Against Uranium Mining with many others successfully prevented new uranium extraction in northwestern New Mexico, a few miles south of the 1979 Churchrock Uranium Spill site.

That project was first licensed approximately 30 years ago, and stopped by decades of community resistance that created layers of Navajo Nation policy: the 2005 Diné Natural Resources Protection Act which prohibits new uranium mining, and the 2012 Radioactive Materials Transportation Act limiting transport of new radioactive products. There is also a 2012 legally binding agreement between the Navajo Nation and the previous company which requires cleanup of existing contamination on other lands before starting new mining activities.

After the mining project was stopped, Laramide Resources Ltd. acquired the land and necessary U.S. federal and state permits to do in situ leach mining near Churchrock, and uranium processing in Crownpoint, New Mexico at its central processing facility.

In late 2022, Diné community members reported that Laramide Resources was illegally drilling for uranium in the Churchrock area. The site was active

with equipment and workers, but has since been vacated. Laramide's drilling samples were transported 40 miles to Crownpoint, for testing in preparation of mining. All these activities now violate Navajo Nation law.

Nearby, separate yet interconnected, the Red Water Pond Road Community Association (RWPR) and others continue to challenge General Electric's "cleanup" plan, which is to move uranium mine wastes on top of the unlined 1979 Churchrock Uranium Spill site waste, both in close proximity to Diné residents (See Summer 2021 *Nukewatch Quarterly* for more info). The "cleanup" of more highly radioactive wastes would be to move them to the White Mesa uranium mill in southeast Utah. RWPR demands that uranium wastes be removed from the community completely and not in a way that could possibly set up conditions for a second Churchrock Spill. The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission issued the Final Environmental Impact Statement in January greenlighting the cleanup plan.

Every year, the RWPR hosts a gathering to reflect on the 1979 Churchrock Uranium Spill and ongoing work to protect their community. This year, RWPR invites the public to the Annual Uranium Legacy Remembrance and Action Day on July 15, 2023 starting with a prayer walk at 7 a.m., 12 miles north of Red Rock State Park on State Road 566 near Churchrock, New Mexico.

— Laramide Resources, March 24; Federal Register, Jan. 13, 2023

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