



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 15, 2015

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Officials identify water resource locations for Navajo communities impacted by water contamination



PHOTO: Federal EPA remedial project manager Linda Reeve along with Navajo translator Ed Singer provide updates to Navajo community members at Nenahnezad Chapter House on August 15, 2015.

NENAHNEZAD, N.M. – Approximately 150 local community members attended an update meeting at Nenahnezad Chapter House on Saturday afternoon, where officials from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, San Juan County in New Mexico, and Navajo Nation Emergency Management provided updates concerning the contamination of the San Juan River as a result of the contamination spill caused by the federal EPA on Aug. 5.

Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) said he understands that many community members still have many questions, while stressing the importance of providing as much information as possible to the Navajo public.

Remedial project manager with the federal EPA, Linda Reeve, said the top priorities for the EPA are the testing of water and sediment samples and providing relief to those who have been impacted by the contamination.

Reeve informed community members that the EPA is also collecting samples from the banks of the San Juan River and from the center of the river bed. She also stated that EPA test results from samples collected from Aug. 7 - 9 would be available on the EPA's website on Saturday.

During the meeting, the EPA identified the following sites where water is available free of charge for those who are in need:

- Upper Fruitland rodeo grounds
- Shiprock rodeo grounds
- Gadi'í'áhi Chapter House
- Teecnospos Chapter House
- Red Valley windmill No. 19-225 near BIA Route 50

San Juan County CEO Kim Carpenter, said the county's top priority remains providing water to all county residents and for the estimated 60,000 heads of livestock in the county.

Although no specific timeline was provided concerning the possible reopening of the San Juan River, Carpenter noted that restrictions on the Animas River in Colorado have been lifted, which is a positive sign that the levels of contaminants have lowered since the initial spill.

Carpenter also stated that the county began flushing its irrigation systems on Friday evening, but cautioned that residents should not continue to refrain from using the water until further notice.

He also said that he anticipates that restrictions on the San Juan River may be lifted as early as Sunday, if results continue to show a decline in the level of contaminants. However, the restrictions would remain in place for Navajo communities until the Navajo Nation decides to lift the restrictions as well.

David Nez with Navajo Nation Emergency Management, said he and emergency officials continue to coordinate efforts with county and federal officials to provide resources as well.

The public was also provided approximately two hours to ask questions of the officials. Many expressed concerns and confusion over the Standard Form 95 form provided by the federal EPA to document losses incurred by local residents as a result of the spill.

Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) was also in attendance and urged federal EPA officials to remove any waiver language within the Standard Form 95. He also demanded that the EPA provide the results of their ongoing testing immediately to the public without

"We don't want EPA filtered data. When you tell us that you're reviewing the data, we don't know what you are doing to it," stated Delegate Tsosie. "We want raw data."

An EPA fact sheet distributed at the meeting states that community members with questions may contact the Navajo Nation Emergency Operations Center at (505) 371-8415 or (505) 371-8408.

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