



# 25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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## **Eastern Navajo Land Commission receives report on Quivera Mine Site cleanup**



**PHOTO: The USEPA provided a report on proposed cleanup alternatives for the Quivera Mine Site to the Eastern Land Commission.**

**Window Rock, Ariz.** - During a regular meeting of the Eastern Navajo Land Commission on Friday, June 30, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) provided a report on the proposed cleanup alternatives for the Quivera Mine Site, located in the Churchrock Chapter area, which include transporting radioactive waste from the site to a proposed Red Rock Facility near Thoreau, N.M. located off of the Navajo Nation.

The Quivera Mine contains low-level mine waste in leftover sand and rocks that contain uranium and radium that pose health and environmental risks.

Brandon Nichalson, USEPA Remedial Project Manager for Region 9, presented four cleanup alternatives to the Commission. The first alternative is to take "No Action" where no cleanup occurs. The second alternative is considered "Capping" where the waste is consolidated, blended back into the landscape, and placed under an engineered cap. The third alternative is to have all waste removed and disposed of at a proposed Red Rock Facility. The fourth alternative is to remove and dispose of all waste at Deer Trail in Colorado.

Eastern Navajo Land Commission Vice-Chair Steven Arviso (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) said that more consultation needs to be done with the Navajo Nation on the proposed alternatives before a cleanup option is decided on.

"It's upsetting to hear that if we don't like the alternatives presented, then the USEPA will just leave the waste in place for "No Action" or to "Cap" the waste where it sits. At what point will the USEPA start caring about our lives," Arviso said. "You have to do better than, 'If you don't like it, we'll just leave it here.'"

Nicholson explained that the third alternative is the most realistic cleanup option. Removing the waste and transporting it to the proposed Red Rock Facility will take approximately three to five years. The Red Rock Facility is located on land fill property, not on trust land and will be permitted by the state of New Mexico.

If permitted, the USEPA will excavate and transport one million cubic yards of low-level mine waste from the Quivera Mine site to the facility.

According to the USEPA, transporting the waste on NM 566 through Church Rock and I-40 is the safest and least disruptive route.

"This is the alternative that we are currently looking at. We've tried to look for other disposal sites, bound by the policies of CERCLA, and there are none. The Red Rock Facility has been identified by the state of New Mexico and is the only off-site alternative," Nicholson said. "Reburying and monitoring is the safest way to remediate. It could also be capped onsite as it sits."

The next steps in the cleanup process are for the USEPA to solicit input from the community and other Navajo Nation representatives, then to finalize the Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis, and finally to conduct a formal public comment period on the proposed alternative in Fall 2023.

To learn more about the process and cleanup alternatives, go to: [www.epa.gov/navajo-nation-uranium-cleanup/eastern-abandoned-uranium-mine-region](http://www.epa.gov/navajo-nation-uranium-cleanup/eastern-abandoned-uranium-mine-region).

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