



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Resources and Development Committee meets with USEPA on Uranium Mine cleanup efforts



RDC members and Speaker Crystalyne Curley met with the US Environmental Protection Agency to discuss uranium mine clean-up.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz – The Resources and Development Committee (RDC) recently met with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) to discuss uranium mine cleanup efforts across the Navajo Nation, focusing on concerns from Navajo leadership and communities about long-term contamination impacts, the effectiveness of cleanup strategies, and the involvement of the Navajo EPA in key decisions.

“Our communities have endured the consequences of uranium contamination for decades. While cleanup efforts are progressing, it is critical that we ensure transparency, accountability, and the active participation of our Nation in every stage of this process,” said RDC Chair Brenda Jesus. “We will not allow outside entities to make decisions without the input of our leadership and our people.”

During the meeting, Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency Director Stephen Etsitty raised concerns about the lack of clear communication between USEPA and Navajo EPA, particularly regarding proposed regional repositories for uranium mine waste. Director Etsitty emphasized the importance of meaningful consultation with all impacted communities before any decisions are finalized. He also stressed the need for a long-term water quality monitoring plan to address potential contamination risks to the Little Colorado River and other vital water sources.

Speaker Crystalyne Curley emphasized the importance of protecting Diné water resources, stating, “We do not know how water will flow in the next 100 years, and we must have a plan in place to ensure our future generations are not burdened with the consequences of today’s decisions. Our people have been the gatekeepers of these lands and waters for centuries, and we will not accept solutions that put our health and environment at further risk.”

Concerns were also raised regarding the oversight of remediated mine sites. Delegate Otto Tso questioned who would be responsible for the long-term monitoring and maintenance of sites once cleanup is completed. Delegate Tso highlighted past issues with uranium waste containment and the necessity of an emergency response plan to address any potential future contamination events.

The discussion further revealed tensions surrounding the proposed consolidation of uranium mine waste. Delegate Danny Simpson expressed frustration over the perceived exclusion of Navajo leadership in early-stage planning. He urged USEPA to prioritize a collaborative approach that centers on the perspectives of Diné communities rather than external interests. RDC members also reiterated calls for the removal of uranium waste from the Navajo Nation entirely, citing health risks and community opposition to on-site storage solutions.

The meeting concluded with a renewed commitment from the RDC and Navajo EPA to advocate for Diné interests in all uranium remediation efforts. The RDC emphasized that future discussions must include comprehensive community consultation and respect for Navajo sovereignty in environmental decision-making.

The next steps involve a proposed work session in June, where additional consultations will take place with Navajo Nation leadership and stakeholders to ensure community concerns are addressed before any further action is taken by USEPA.

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