



NNEPA



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NAVAJO NATION **Navajo Abandoned Uranium Mines Project Plan** DECEMBER 2001

Introduction

The Navajo Abandoned Uranium Mines (NAUM) Project is the combined effort of the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and the Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency (NNEPA) to assess the need for environmental action at abandoned uranium mines on Navajo lands. The project started in 1994 and is currently ongoing. This fact sheet describes current project goals, future plans and respective agency roles.

Work Performed to Date

- NNEPA and USEPA have assessed the Oaksprings area (King Tutt Mesa) in the Red Valley Chapter and are evaluating the need to add this area to the Superfund list.
- NNEPA organized an Ad Hoc Committee to assist in reviewing NAUM reports and disseminating the information to the impacted chapters.
- USEPA conducted aerial radiological surveys of 41 mining areas throughout the Arizona/Utah portions of the Navajo Nation (1,144 square miles). USEPA also sampled water at 227 sources for radioactivity and heavy metals possibly related to the mines, conducted radiation surveys of 28 homes and of 34 mining areas. This information is summarized on the project maps which was distributed to each of the chapters sampled and is available on CD ROM copies from USEPA.
- A team of several Navajo and Federal environmental and health agencies shared the water sampling results and other information from the NAUM project with approximately 30 chapters in the Arizona and Utah areas of the Navajo Nation. The results were shared at a variety of chapter events including health fairs.

Project Overview

The USEPA and NNEPA will build upon previous studies using a three-phase Superfund approach for the NAUM project:

Phase 1 Locate the abandoned uranium mines

USEPA determines the location of abandoned uranium mines based on historical maps and records. In the past, USEPA has also used aerial helicopter radiation surveys to identify sources of radiation in suspected mining areas.

Phase 2 Develop list of abandoned uranium mines

USEPA will gather and organize existing information to create a list of abandoned uranium mine sites located throughout the Navajo Nation. This information will include the size of the mine(s), contaminants levels, proximity to communities and surface water. This information will be analyzed and presented using Geographic Information System (GIS) maps. NNEPA will conduct a followup assessment of the sites which appear to be hazardous (Phase 3).

Phase 3 Further Assessment of Priority Sites

NNEPA will perform further assessment of the sites posing a serious risk to human health or the environment. This phase of the assessment may include field sampling and on-site monitoring. The assessment performed by NNEPA will determine whether an abandoned mine site requires further action. For these sites, NNEPA will work with USEPA to develop investigation and action plans.

Future Work

NNEPA and USEPA will initially focus on the Shiprock agencies, starting with the Red Valley Chapter. The overall goal of the project is to examine mining areas across the Navajo Nation.

Questions and Concerns

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