

Teracita Keyanna stands on Red Water Pond Road



...also called 'radioactive road'. Photo by Talli Nauman

Red Water Pond Road Community Association

RWPRCA, founded in 2007, is based near Churchrock, New Mexico in the Coyote Chapter of the Navajo Nation. The community lives between two Superfund sites, the Northeast Churchrock Mine and the Quivera/Kerr McGee Mine and one uranium mill Superfund site, the United Nuclear Corporation Churchrock Mill.

The Northeast Churchrock Mine (NECR) site is the largest defunct mine on the Navajo Nation. NECR has the highest priority for cleanup through EPA Region 9. However, the plans for cleanup have been postponed by several years and is currently not scheduled to start until 2020 and could take 7-9 years.

In the meantime, the Community lives with high radium exposures from the air and even after the cleanup, the ground water will remain contaminated.

MISSION

The Red Water Pond Road Community Association's mission is to restore the land and water contaminated by uranium mining, improve the health of community members, and protect and preserve the natural and cultural environment in which they live.

RWPRCA is a nonprofit organization recognized under Navajo Nation laws including Fundamental Laws of the Diné, Title 1, Chapter 2.

Single Largest Radioactive Accident in US History

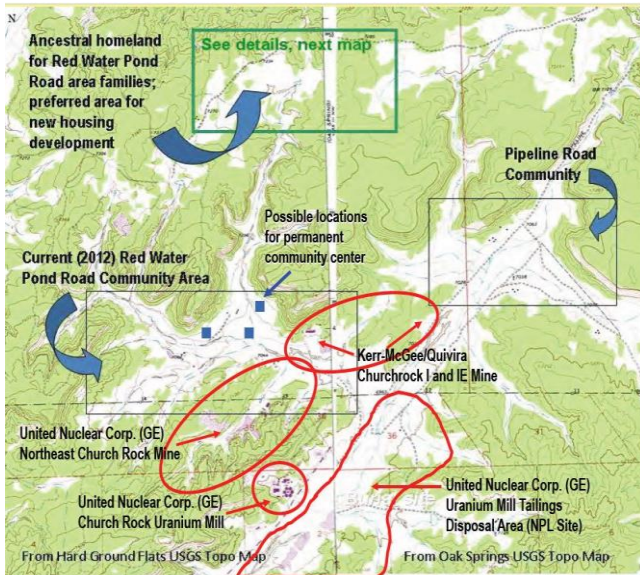
On July 16, 1979, an earthen dam owned by the United Nuclear Corp. broke and released 1,100 tons of radioactive uranium tailings and 94 gallons of toxic wastewater into the Rio Puerco, contaminating the river for at least 80 miles.

The radioactive material was a mixture of water and mill tailings; a yellow slurry which retained toxic contaminants from the mining process. When the earthen dam broke, the radioactive broth affected the communities of Pinedale, Church Rock, Gallup, Tseyatoh and Manuelito in New Mexico, and Lupton, Houck, and the Newlands area near Sanders and Chambers in Arizona. Cattle were contaminated, sheep died and several hundred families were left without a water source.

The spill remains the single largest release of radioactive material in US history. Yet its effects on the health of the area's people and animals and harm to the environment has not been adequately studied by the government.

Every July 16 for the last 37 years, as Edith Hood, a RWPRCA leader describes *"We walk to the site and say healing prayers. We believe we need to support one another and cherish all our families and communities, just as our elders have. By working together, with our combined intelligence and wisdom we can address this legacy to provide a life of balance and harmony for our people and future generations."*





CURRENT INITIATIVES

RWPRC members are facing a third major cleanup with the work on the Northeast Churchrock site. Because EPA has failed to coordinate the remediation at the Quivera/Kerr McGee Mine which would minimize the displacement of the community, they are facing decades of ongoing reclamation. EPA Region 9 has offered a “voluntary relocation” during the time of the cleanup. Some of the community members wish to move three miles up the canyon to their traditional use area at Standing Black Tree Mesa. But EPA is dragging its bureaucratic feet saying they can’t pay for “permanent housing” or infrastructure to support the community.

- RWPRCA is working with Navajo Nation agencies to secure home site leases and determine costs for relocation to the mesa.
- Working with the New Mexico Environmental Law Center RWPCA and others are petitioning the EPA to overturn a mining company’s exemption allowing the discharge of chemicals into the aquifer that is a drinking water source near Churchrock. The petition argues that EPA rules do not protect groundwater, and fail to consider the true reach of pollutants from drilling and mining activities.

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RWPCA TESTIFIES BEFORE THE INTER-AMERICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS HEARINGS ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO WATER IN THE US.

“It is past time for the U.S. and New Mexico governments to take our concerns seriously and take action to guarantee our rights to safe water”

Teracita Keyanna, Red Water Pond Road Community Association. April 4, 2016

At the invitation of the Commission, members of the Red Water Pond Road Community Association (RWPCA) Teracita testified about how the communities have been denied equal access to quality drinking water for decades.

“We were never told of the dangers and hazards of these mines. Now I understand that my own family has suffered health impacts from our exposures to uranium contaminated dust and water,” she said “It is past time for the U.S. and New Mexico governments to take our concerns seriously and take action to guarantee our rights to safe water.”



Edith Hood, RWPCA, testifies at Water and Human Rights Hearing

“Equal access to clean drinking water is such a fundamental moral value, most Americans take it for granted” says Eric Jantz, NMELC staff attorney. “But rather than working to guarantee clean water for everyone, the federal and New Mexico government has prioritized allowing industry to pollute pristine aquifers. This has to change.”