

## **“America's Secret Chernobyl”**

### **Uranium Mining and Nuclear Pollution in the Upper Midwest:**

1. World War II ended with the nuclear bomb and introduced the use of nuclear energy for the production of electricity which caused the price of uranium to rise. Uranium mining in South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, and North Dakota began in the middle of the 1960s. As the economy of the Midwestern states depends primarily on agriculture, when uranium was discovered in the region, many get-rich-quick schemes were adopted. Not only were large mining companies pushing off the tops of bluffs and buttes, but small individual ranchers were also digging in their pastures for the radioactive metal. Mining occurred on both public and private land, although the Great Sioux Nation still maintains a claim to the area through the Fort Laramie Treaties of 1851 and 1868, the March 3rd Act of 1871, Article VI of the US Constitution, and the 1980 Supreme Court decision on the Black Hills.

2. In northwestern South Dakota, the Cave Hills area is managed by the US Forest Service. The area currently contains 89 abandoned open-pit uranium mines. Studies by the USFS show that one mine alone has 1,400 millirems per hour (mR/hr) of exposed radiation, a level of radiation that is 120,000 times higher than normal background of 100 millirems per year (mR/yr)! In the southwestern Black Hills, the US Forest Service reported on 29 abandoned open-pit uranium mines, one of which is about 1 square mile in size.

3. It is estimated that more than 1,000 open-pit uranium mines and prospects can be found in the four state region from a map developed by the US Forest Service. The water runoff from the creeks and rivers near these abandoned uranium mines eventually empties into the Missouri River which empties into the Mississippi River.

4. The following agencies are aware of these abandoned uranium mines and prospects: US Forest Service, US Environmental Protection Agency, US Bureau of Land Management, SD Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the US Indian Health Service. Only after public concern about these mines was raised a few years ago did the USFS and the EPA pay for a study in 2006 of the off site effects caused by only 1 abandoned mine.

5. More than 4,000 exploratory holes, some large enough for a person to fall into, are found in the southwestern Black Hills with an additional 3,000 holes just 10 miles west of the town of Belle Fourche, SD near the Wyoming border. These holes go to depths of 600 feet. This exploratory process itself allows radioactive pollutants to cross contaminate underground water sources. More exploratory holes for uranium are being drilled in Wyoming and South Dakota.

6. The US Air Force also used small nuclear power plants in some of their remote radar stations. No data is available on the current status or disposal of these small nuclear

power sources or of their wastes. The US Air Force is responsible for monitoring these sites although there is no stopping the radioactive pollution that could contaminate aquifers.

7. In Wyoming, hundreds of abandoned open-pit uranium mines and prospects can be found in or near the coal in the Powder River Basin, and the coal is laced with uranium ore. The coal is shipped to power plants in the Eastern part of the United States. Radioactive dust and particles are released into the air at the coal fired power plants and often set off the warning systems at nuclear power plants. The same radioactive dust and particles are released into the air that travels across South Dakota and to the South and East in the coal strip mining process.

8. In 1972, President Richard Nixon signed a secret Executive Order declaring this four State region in the Upper Midwest to be a 'National Sacrifice Area' for the mining and production of uranium and nuclear energy.

## **Conclusion**

This Fact Sheet regarding past and planned uranium and coal mining in the Upper Midwest region should give cause for alarm to all thinking people in the United States. This is the area that has been called "the Bread Basket of the World." For more than forty years, the people of South Dakota and beyond have been subjected to radioactive polluted dust and water runoff from the hundreds of abandoned open pit uranium mines, processing sites, underground nuclear power stations, and waste dumps.

There needs to be a concerted effort to determine the extent of the radioactive pollution in the environment, and the health damage that has been and is currently being inflicted upon the people of the United States.

It is imperative that a federal bill be passed in Congress appropriating enough funds for the cleanup of ALL the abandoned uranium mines in this four State region. This harmful situation must not be placed on the end of the Superfund list of hazardous sites to be addressed in twenty years. Those responsible for this disaster must be held responsible for the consequences, but the cleanup and health concerns of the nation need to be addressed first. The health of the nation is at stake!

The cleanup of all of these mines and underground sites must begin NOW!

We hope you will consider our request for concerted actions to be taken at the national level regarding these grave concerns. This problem of radiation pollution spreading throughout the United States has been allowed to continue quietly for much too long.

\*\*\*\*\* What you can do \*\*\*\*\*

1. Contact your Congressional Representative and Senators by phone (202) 224-3121, through the mail, and email. Ask that they consider sponsoring a bill for the cleanup of all

the abandoned uranium mines and prospects, and underground nuclear sites in the Upper Midwest Region of South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming.

2. Ask your Congressional Representatives and Senators to support the Expansion of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) to include also those harmed by abandoned uranium mines and prospects in the Upper Midwest Region.

3. Encourage the use of alternative sources of energy such as wind, solar, and geothermal. Nuclear energy is not the answer and only creates very long term problems to the entire environment.

Thank you!

Produced by Defenders of the Black Hills, PO Box 2003, Rapid City, SD 57709, a non-profit corporation.

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