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2010 PRESS RELEASES

Climate bill ignores nuclear power's hidden costs on communities and the environment

Uranium-impacted communities call on the Nation's leaders to protect our air, water and public health

WASHINGTON, D.C., May 14 -- This week, Senators Kerry and Lieberman moved the debate forward on ways to meet our Nation's energy needs and address the global problem of climate change. Regrettably, the proposal includes new incentives for nuclear power and erodes safeguards for development of nuclear energy. The impact on communities across the Rocky Mountain region will be immediate and potentially destructive.

The release of the Kerry-Lieberman draft climate change proposal coincides with an outcry from uranium mining experts and impacted community members who traveled to Washington DC this week to educate members of Congress about the hidden costs of nuclear power in the development of uranium in West.

Uranium is highly toxic. When mined, other radioactive decay elements such as radium and thorium are produced. Lung cancer, skin cancer, bone cancer, leukemia, kidney damage and birth defects are all linked to exposure from these radioactive elements.

"Thanks to the contamination it creates, uranium mining endangers the health of mine workers, the public, and ground and surface waters," said Liliias Jarding, PhD, with the Clean Water Alliance in South Dakota.

Uranium was heavily mined in the United States from the 1940's to 1980's to fuel the last big push for nuclear material during the arms race. This boom in uranium mining created a toxic legacy for communities and left behind major environmental damage. The EPA estimates there are at least 4,000 abandoned uranium mines in 14 western states, with most situated in Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, and Wyoming.

"Indigenous communities throughout the West have suffered disproportionately from uranium development. They pay the real environmental cost of nuclear power: uranium exploration, mining, and toxic waste," said Nikos Pastos with the Center for Water Advocacy in Utah. "Before any more new uranium mines are permitted, Congress must clean up the ones that still poison our landscape," he continued.

"Better regulation is needed to ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated in the present," said Lauren Pagel, Policy Director for EARTHWORKS. "Uranium mining needs to be managed like the other energy sources found on federal lands, with a fair return to the treasury and some discretion to say no to a uranium mine if it poses a threat to water or public health," she continued.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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