



VOICES *from the* EARTH



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Protecting Communities



Southwest Research and Information Center is a multi-cultural organization working to promote the health of people and communities, protect natural resources, ensure citizen participation, and secure environmental and social justice now and for future generations.

“The challenge of social justice is to evoke a sense of community that we need to make our nation a better place, just as we make it a safer place.”

— MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN, 2001
FOUNDER & PRESIDENT OF THE CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND

Southwest Research and Information Center's mission hasn't changed much over the last 39 years: we still focus on protecting communities. From the early years of technical assistance to more recent work to assess local pollution problems and help communities protect their natural resources, direct involvement has been an integral part of our work. While we still work to educate and provide assistance to communities, some of our focus has changed: we now work more closely with communities and agencies to educate people about health impacts and to address the problems.


In this issue of *Voices from the Earth*, we focus on some of these health impacts. Decades after stopping production, old uranium mines and mills in the Southwest still affect the communities around them. We revisit the communities near Milan, New Mexico that are in the shadow of the Homestake uranium mill tailings piles. In the last (Spring) issue, we focused on the groundwater contamination issues that the communities have endured for decades. In this issue we focus on a different type of contamination: Radon. Radon is a colorless, odorless radioactive gas that is a recognized carcinogen. For the last 35 years, the residential areas bordering Homestake's property have been tested periodically for radon. The radon levels in these homes are on average two times higher than the average average indoor level in the U.S.; while outdoor levels range from three to more than 10 times the local, state or national averages. SRIC's Chris Shuey discusses some of the technical aspects of these levels and why people are concerned on pages 5–8.

Other uranium impacts also are discussed in this issue. The continuing efforts by uranium companies and their supporters to mine under Mount Taylor — a site listed as a Traditional Cultural Property (TCP) by the New Mexico Historical Preservation Division — remains

an issue to communities and tribes (see pages 4–5). Representatives and membership organizations from the Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment recently traveled to Washington, DC to talk to congressional members about the uranium miners and millers who are not covered under the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA). From increasing the number of covered diseases to extending coverage for miners and millers who worked after 1971, bills to expand RECA coverage have been introduced recently by New Mexico Senator Tom Udall and Representative Ben R. Lujan (see page 11). In Churchrock, New Mexico, communities commemorated the 31st Anniversary of the Church Rock Uranium Mill Tailings Spill, by volume the largest release of radioactive wastes in the U.S (see page 11).

RECA also provides some coverage to downwinders affected by nuclear weapons testing. The law also needs to be expanded to cover victims of the first test at the Trinity Site in New Mexico on July 16, 1945. People in the area of that test also are seeking health studies and compensation (see page 10).

SRIC's Sofia Martinez looks at health through the lens of environmental justice/reproductive justice (EJ/RJ). EJ/RJ looks at all aspects of women's lives: from the history of the slave trade to health issues. Historically, control over reproduction has been used to control lives and livelihoods. But the need for healthy households and workplaces is also paramount. Martinez is part of a coalition of groups working on these issues (see pages 3 & 9).

We also want to introduce to you three more SRIC board members: Esther Yazzie-Lewis, Robert Nofchissey, and Ann Watson (see page 2). Each brings a unique perspective and valuable advice and support to our work. We will be introducing you to more of our board members in the next issue. 

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