

Uranium Watch – Utah Bulletin

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◆ Division of Air Quality Grants Permit to Uranium Mines in La Sal

On October 26, 2009, the Utah Division of Air Quality (DAQ) issued an Approval Order to Denison Mines Corporation for their uranium mines in La Sal: the Pandora Mine and La Sal Complex (Beaver Shaft, La Sal, and Snowball). The Approval only covers non-radiological emissions from the surface and underground operation. The Approval implies that the mines are yet to commence operation, when, in fact the mines have been operating for quite some time.

The Approval does not address the radon emissions from the mines. The mines have been operating without Denison Mines submitting the required application and receiving approval by the DAQ. The DAQ is to send a letter to all uranium mine owners in Utah informing them of their responsibilities to submit an application for their radon emissions if they will mine 100,000 tons ore over the life of the mine. Utah has administrative and enforcement authority over radon emissions at Utah uranium mines and mills.

Radon is venting from the mines less than half a mile from the La Sal Elementary School, store, post office, and community center. In addition to radon, short-lived, highly radioactive products from the decay of radon are released from the vents. Soils and aerosols in the immediate vicinity of the mine vents take up these radionuclides. According to the annual report for 2008 that was submitted to the DAQ and EPA by Denison Mines, the vent nearest the Beaver Shaft emits the greatest amount of radon. Based on computer modeling, the mines are in compliance with EPA standards for exposure to the nearest resident, but there is no off-site monitoring to confirm those figures.

◆ NEPA Review for New Plan of Operations at Pandora and La Sal Complex

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Moab is expecting Denison Mines to submit a new plan of operations for the Pandora Mine and La Sal Complex. The BLM plans to develop a new document in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), probably an Environmental Assessment. The original operation plans were submitted and approved in 1981, with minimal environmental review. The BLM has never looked at the impacts of the radon emission from these mines. The BLM has not assessed the cumulative impacts of each mine operation, along with the current impacts of other mines that are operating, will likely operate, or operated in the past in the La Sal area or the region.

◆ Denison Mines Plans Two New Mine Vents and Exploratory Drilling for Pandora Mine

Denison Mines has requested permission from the Forest Service to install two new radon vent holes and 16 exploration drill holes on Forest Service land south of the current Pandora Mine operation. Uranium Watch commented on the draft permit for the vent holes and exploratory drilling. Particularly, the vent holes are small increments in the whole Pandora Mine operation, and should be evaluated in the context of an Environmental Assessment of the whole mine operation. See

www.fs.fed.us/r4/mantilasal/projects/projects_moabmonticello/projectsmoabmonticello_proposed.shtml.

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◆ Uranium Watch and Others Protest San Juan County Water Conservancy District Application for Water for Nuclear Reactor

Uranium Watch and Living Rivers, along with a number of individuals, organizations, and governmental entities protested the withdrawal of water for a nuclear power plant a few miles west of the City of Green River. The San Juan County Water Conservancy District (SJCWCD) filed a Change Application for 24,000 acre-feet of water, originally allocated from the San Juan River for a coal-fired power plant. They requested the change to provide water for the Blue Castle Holdings Inc. (formerly Transition Power Development LLC) nuclear project. The proposed changes are to Water Right 09-492 for the point of diversion, place of use, nature of use, and for reservoir storage of the water.

See <<http://www.waterrights.utah.gov/cblapps/wrprint.exe?wrnum=09-462>>.

Blue Castle Holdings, Inc. (BCH) leased the water from the SJCWCD in 2007, along with 29,600 acre-feet of water from the Kane County Water Conservancy District, for a total of 53,600 acre-feet (almost 50 million gallons per day).

Protesters include Green River ranchers, farmers, canal companies, and river expedition companies. These protesters are concerned about the adverse impacts to their use of Green River Water and impacts to recreational use should the water be withdrawn from the river. The Center for Biological Diversity, HEAL Utah, Red Rock Forests, Uintah County Water Conservancy District, also protested. The US Fish and Wildlife Service submitted concerns about the impacts of the withdrawal on three threatened fish species. They are concerned that the impacts on threatened fish species would result in having to list them as endangered species, triggering additional federal actions and bringing the total to six endangered fish species in the Green River.

Little information is available in the application, so many questions remain about the project's economic feasibility, the amount of water that would be available without adversely impacting other water users in Green River, the impacts to river recreation and the down stream environment, long term impacts of climate changes and drought to water availability, and the financial ability of BCH to complete project.

According to BCH's website (www.bluecastleproject.com/), they are "accumulating the required assets to begin licensing a shovel ready site for the deployment of a new nuclear power production facility." They would apply for an Early Site Permit from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, good for up to 40 years, and would not construct and operate the reactor themselves. More information: <http://www.uraniumwatch.org/bluecastle.htm>

◆ Division of Radiation Control Holds Hearing in Blanding on Modification of White Mesa Ground Water Discharge Permit

October 7, 2009, the Division of Radiation Control held a public hearing in Blanding on the modification of the White Mesa Mill's Ground Water Discharge Permit. Uranium Watch and representatives from the Ute Mt. Ute Environmental Program attended the hearing. The new permit will establish groundwater compliance levels for point of compliance wells, requires additional monitoring, and requires an isotopic ground water and surface water investigation, similar to the one funded by the DRC for a limited number of wells.

See <http://www.radiationcontrol.utah.gov/Uranium_Mills/IUC/groundwaterpmt/index.html>.

The Uranium Watch is a 501(c)(3) non-profit under the fiscal umbrella of Living Rivers (www.livingrivers.org). Donations are tax deductible and greatly appreciated. Make checks out to Uranium Watch. Mail to Uranium Watch, PO Box 344, Moab, Utah 84532.

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