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## **Governor signs uranium-mining law**

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Colorado now has a law to protect water from contamination associated with in situ uranium mining.

Tuesday, Gov. Bill Ritter signed House Bill 1161 — a measure Fort Collins lawmaker John Kefalas and mining CEO Richard Clement hailed as one of the toughest in the country.

The law, which goes into effect July 1, requires mining companies to restore water to previous quality or to state standards.

Four Larimer County lawmakers — two representatives and two senators — sponsored the bill at the urging of a group of area citizens who are worried about a potential uranium mine in Weld County.

Coloradoans Against Resource Destruction has collected thousands of signatures against a proposed mine in the Laramie-Fox Hills aquifer.

The company that plans to apply for permits to mine from the aquifer, Powertech Inc., has said the process is safe and will not contaminate the water.

The residents who drink it and provide it to their animals as well as thousands who live nearby are not convinced.

Robin and Jay Davis have a home and horse boarding facility right next the proposed mine site. They have been actively involved in C.A.R.D.

“A year ago we felt helpless,” Davis said at the bill signing ceremony, according to the Associated Press. “We discovered there were no regulations to protect water. As we know, water is life. We were very scared.”

They turned their fear to action and worked with Reps. Kefalas and Randy Fischer and Senators Steve Johnson and Bob Bacon, a mix of Democrats and Republicans.

Fischer said he considers the new law a highlight of this year and is pleased Ritter chose to highlight it with a ceremony.

“The whole purpose of the bill is to protect human health, protect our groundwater supplies from contamination, and to protect personal property rights that may be impacted by this type of mining,” he said.

“The bill is not intended to prevent or prohibit mining. It’s simply a measure to make sure we have very stringent standards in place before mining can take place.”

Powertech officials were not available Monday to talk about the new law. The company, instead, issued a written reaction.

“Colorado has created a specialized regulatory regime for in situ uranium recovery that is the most restrictive of any state in the United States,” President and CEO Richard Clement said.

“However, the new law will need refinement over the next few years before it can become a truly efficient and effective regulatory scheme.”

That refinement, according to Powertech, will not diminish the protection of the environment and water, but mesh the “proven principles” of in situ mining with the new rules.

The company will focus on showing how its plans meet the new standards, Clement said.

“We are progressing with the data collection at our Weld County operation, and we anticipate having all the necessary data collected by the end of 2008,” said Clement.

“What we learn from the data will be used by the regulators to determine the baseline characteristics of the Centennial Project, and it will also provide valuable information to the General Assembly as the new law is refined in future sessions.”

While Powertech intends to stay at the table, so do members of Coloradoans Against Resource Destruction. In its newsletter, the volunteer group stressed that members plan to work with state officials on how to implement the new law.

“Without strong rules, it won’t be effective in protecting our water, people and land,” according to the newsletter.

“For example, the rules will get down to the nitty gritty and define exactly what a 'violation' is and exactly when water is clean enough.”

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