Introduction

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) has released a draft report on exposure to contamination from the Jackpile-Paguate Uranium Mine and related effects on nearby people’s health. ATSDR is an advisory public health agency and is required to do this type of evaluation for all Superfund sites. The objectives of the evaluation were:

- Provide information about how the community’s health could have been affected by contaminants from the site.
- Make recommendations for gathering more information, if needed.
- Make recommendations for reducing harmful exposures.


The Jackpile-Paguate Uranium Mine operated from the early 1950s to 1982 and was once the largest open-pit uranium mine in the world. Wastes from mining operations have contaminated the surrounding area with uranium, other naturally occurring radioactive materials, and heavy metals. Several villages of the Laguna Pueblo are near the site. In 2011-2012, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) assessed many homes in the area for radiation sources or radon and took actions to remove sources and abate radon, if needed.

Summary of Key Findings

- Nearby residents are unlikely to be harmed by current exposures to radiation if their homes were tested and radon abatement systems (if needed) are operating correctly. But, people could have an increased risk of cancer if their homes contain sources of radiation or radon that haven’t been fully assessed or if their radon abatement system isn’t used as directed.
- Children and adults who swim or wade in the rivers or reservoir downstream from the site are not likely to be harmed by contaminants in the water or sediment.
- ATSDR does not have enough information to conclude whether the following exposures are or were harmful:
  - Eating fish, animals, or plants collected or processed near the site.
  - Living or spending time in the former mine housing area.
  - Living in villages near the mine, or wading or swimming in rivers or reservoirs downstream from the site in the past (while the mine was operating).
ATSDR Agency Recommendations

ATSDR recommends that:

- EPA continue to offer radiation surveys to residents who may not have participated previously and address any radioactive source materials identified.
- EPA or the Pueblo conduct ongoing radon monitoring and offer assistance to ensure radon abatement systems are operated continuously and maintained effectively.
- EPA continue investigating the site and conduct additional sampling to characterize potential exposures. ATSDR will review the data and comment on the health implications of the results, upon request.
- The Pueblo and/or EPA continue to restrict access to the mine and inform the public of the presence of potentially hazardous materials in the watershed downstream. This recommendation is based on the limited information on how people might access the site and downstream areas.

ATSDR Community Recommendations

While site investigations are ongoing, ATSDR offers the following general recommendations for nearby residents to reduce their potential exposures to uranium, radon, or other contaminants related to mining operations:

- Stay away from the mine site.
- Don’t gather plants or take clay, rocks, gravel, dirt, sand, or water from the mine site.
- Graze livestock away from the mine site.
- Allow EPA to survey your property for radiation and your home for radon.
- Use the public water system for all your family’s household needs – don’t use untreated water.
- Talk with your doctor if you are worried you may have exposure to uranium or radon.
- Follow your doctor’s advice to stay healthy. Staying healthy helps your body deal with stressors like uranium or radiation.

Next Steps

ATSDR’s report is available for review at: http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/HAC/PHA/HCPHA.asp?State=NM and at the Laguna Public Library at 29 Rodeo Dr. in Laguna. Your comments will improve the quality of the report. Send comments by March 9, 2018 to ATSDRRecordsCenter@cdc.gov, or mail to:

ATSDR Records Center, ATTN: Rolanda Morrison
RE: Jackpile-Paguate Uranium Mine Site, Laguna, NM
1600 Clifton Rd., NE (MS F-09)
Atlanta, GA 30329-4018

Written comments received during the public comment period and ATSDR responses will appear in an appendix to the final report. The report will not include the names of people submitting comments. However, their names may be releasable if we receive a U.S. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request.

Where to Learn More

ATSDR: www.atsdr.cdc.gov
Radon: https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/substances/toxsubstance.asp?toxid=71
Uranium: https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/substances/toxsubstance.asp?toxid=77

For questions about ATSDR activities at this site, contact Patrick Young, ATSDR’s Regional Representative in Dallas, at young.patrick@epa.gov or at 214-665-8562.