

# MULTICULTURAL ALLIANCE FOR A SAFE ENVIRONMENT (MASE)

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## MEDIA ADVISORY

### **Remembering the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Largest Radioactive Spill in US History**

*“The largest release of radioactive waste occurred right down the road from me. To this day, this dangerous contamination has not been adequately addressed.”*

*Larry J. King, Churchrock resident, before the U.S. House of Representatives, October 23, 2007*

CHURCH ROCK, NM – The Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment (MASE) — a coalition of community groups affected by uranium mining and committed to renewable energy development — announces the 30th Anniversary Commemoration of the Church Rock Uranium Tailings Spill on July 16, 2009.

The purposes of this event are to remember and honor the Diné communities that were affected by the largest release of radioactive waste in U.S. history, and to reaffirm the Navajo Nation’s ban on uranium mining and processing, as set forth in the Diné Natural Resources Protection Act (DNRPA) of 2005.

A prayer walk will be held on State Route 566 from Red Water Pond Road next to the Northeast Church Rock Mine to the site of the spill across from the United Nuclear Corp. (UNC) mill site, and ending at the King Family Ranch on Old Churchrock Mine Road at SR 566 — a distance of about 5 miles. Prayers for healing will offered at the start of the walk and at the spill site. The walk will end at the King Ranch Larry J. King, son of the late Howard King, with a press conference where Navajo Nation elected officials will reaffirm the Navajo Nation ban on uranium mining.

The Church Rock Spill occurred when an earthen tailings dam at the UNC Church Rock Uranium Mill failed on the morning of July 16, 1979. The mill’s radioactive fluids spilled into the Puerco River in New Mexico and traveled downstream to Chambers, Ariz. More radiation was released in the spill than in the Three Mile Island reactor accident, which occurred in March of that same year, and the spill ranks second only to the 1986 Chernobyl reactor meltdown in the amount of radiation released. The spill, combined with more than 20 years of discharges of untreated and poorly treated uranium mine water, has contributed to long-term contamination of the Puerco River in New Mexico and Arizona.

Commemorating the Church Rock Spill is a reminder that the burden of the Uranium Legacy is still being carried by the Diné people and communities throughout the Grants Mineral Belt. A formal clean-up plan for the Northeast Church Rock Mine was issued in June, 27 years after the mine closed. Red Water Pond Road residents living next to the mine will have to move temporarily this later this year as more work is done to remove contamination from their community. Full reclamation of the Old Church Rock Mine across from the King Ranch remains to be done. MASE groups from Laguna Pueblo to Milan to Church Rock continue to press federal and state agencies for a comprehensive plan to address



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the Uranium Legacy, to hold companies like UNC and its parent, General Electric, responsible for cleanup, to fund needed health studies, and to compensate uranium workers for their health problems.

**For more details, consult the attached flier for an agenda of the July 16<sup>th</sup> Events**

Visit [www.sric.org/Churchrock](http://www.sric.org/Churchrock) for background information

**MASE Core Groups:**

Bluewater Valley Downstream Alliance, *Milan*  
Dineh Bidziil Coalition, *Navajo Nation*  
Eastern Navajo Diné Against Uranium Mining (ENDAUM), *Churchrock and Crownpoint*  
Laguna-Acoma Coalition for a Safe Environment, *Acoma and Laguna Pueblos*  
Post-71 Uranium Workers Committee, *Grants*

**MASE Affiliated Groups:**

Amigos Bravos, *Taos and Albuquerque*  
McKinley Community Health Alliance, *Gallup*  
Moquino Mutual Domestic Water Consumers Association, *Cebolleta*  
New Mexico Environmental Justice Working Group, *Albuquerque*  
New Mexico Environmental Law Center, *Santa Fe*  
Office of Peace, Justice and Creation Stewardship, *Gallup*  
Partnership for Earth Spirituality, *Albuquerque*  
Ramah Navajo Community, *Ramah*  
Red Water Pond Road Community Association, *Coyote Canyon Chapter*  
SAGE Council, *Albuquerque*  
Sierra Club Environmental Justice Office, *Flagstaff*  
Southwest Research and Information Center, *Albuquerque*  
Stewards of Creation, *Albuquerque and Gallup*