

Uranium Watch

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Contacts:

Sarah M. Fields, Uranium Watch, 435-210-0166
Harold Shepherd, Center for Water Advocacy, 435-259-5640,
541-377-0960

Suit Filed to Stop Uranium Exploration and Installation of Radon Vent Holes at Pandora Mine in La Sal, Utah

Moab, Utah — Uranium Watch, Center for Water Advocacy, and Living Rivers, conservation groups located in Moab, Utah, yesterday filed suit in federal district court in Salt Lake City to halt uranium exploration and the construction of radon vent holes on U.S. Forest Service land in the Manti-La Sal National Forest in La Sal, Utah.

The complaint filed with the United States District Court for the District of Utah challenges a decision by the Moab/Monticello Ranger District to permit the drilling of 16 exploration drill holes and 2 radon vent holes as part of the expansion of the Pandora Uranium Mine. The Pandora Mine is owned by Denison Mines (USA) Corporation (Denison). Uranium ore from the mine is transported to Denison's uranium mill on White Mesa, a few miles south of Blanding in San Juan County.

The groups also filed a request for a preliminary injunction at the Pandora Mine to stay ground disturbance and construction of the exploration holes and radon vent holes until the case can be fully heard by the federal court.

The citizens groups challenge the granting of a "categorical exclusion" for the projects and requested that the Forest Service develop a full environmental analysis of the projects as part of the proposed expansion of the Pandora Mine and La Sal Complex (Beaver Shaft, La Sal, and Snowball Mines). The "categorical exclusion" process was the same used by the Interior Department in approving the infamous Deepwater Horizon oil well in the Gulf of Mexico. A "categorical exclusion" means that the agency did not conduct any detailed environmental review and provided limited opportunity for public input under the National Environmental Policy Act ("NEPA").

The new drilling and radon venting projects are directly tied to Denison's adjacent Pandora uranium mine. In December 2009 Denison Mines submitted an amended Plan of Operations to the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Utah Division of Oil, Gas & Mining. Despite the fact that both Denison and the U.S. Forest Service acknowledge the new drilling and radon venting is connected to the

Pandora Mine, the Forest Service approved the new projects without any consideration of the cumulative environmental impacts from the expansion of the Pandora Mine.

The Pandora Mine is operating under an inadequate and outdated Plan of Operations and Environmental Assessment (EA) from 1981. "The Forest Service should not approve any expansion of the mine until there is a fully updated Plan of Operations and EA or Environmental Impact Statement for the Pandora Mine and other Denison mines in La Sal," states Sarah Fields, Uranium Watch Program Director.

Radon is vented to the surface from the underground mine operations so that the miners will not breath in the radon gas and be exposed to the short-lived highly radioactive particles that are produced when radon decays. The proposed radon vents would add to the amount of radon gas and radioactive particulates released in the vicinity of the community of La Sal, on the south slope of the La Sal Mountains. In 2009, the amount of radon released from the uranium mines in La Sal jumped from 300 Curies to over 4,500 Curies, according to Denison's annual reports to the Utah Division of Air Quality. Radon is released from vents near the Beaver Shaft not far from the La Sal Elementary School.

Attorneys representing the plaintiff groups in the litigation are Joro Walker and Robert Dubuc of Western Resource Advocates in Salt Lake City, Eric Jantz of the New Mexico Environmental Law Center, Roger Flynn of the Western Mining Action Project, based in Colorado.