

Doralee Larson

To the New Mexico Environment Department:

I was born just outside of Edgemont, South Dakota and lived there until I was 13 years old. As I was growing up the concept of open-pit uranium mining never crossed my mind. Nor was it on the consciousness of my young friends as we played and explored the largest sand piles any kid could ever imagine. Fast forward the years it has taken us to realize the hideous dangers of those gargantuan uranium mill tailings piles.

Finally, in 1978, Congress passed and then-President Jimmy Carter signed the Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act, which directed the U.S. Department of Energy to stabilize, dispose of and control uranium mill tailings and other contaminated material at uranium mill sites. Later that year, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission ordered the Tennessee Valley Authority to plan the decommissioning of the long-dormant Edgemont uranium mill.

How is this relevant or applicable to WIPP and the proposed DOE changes there? I and many other very intelligent, aware and informed individuals believe that the DOE is again 'gas-lighting' the public and specifically New Mexico residents into believing that the proposed changes and growth at WIPP will not lead to any danger in our state.

WIPP should never be considered the only nuclear weapons repository in the US. New Mexico residents were told, actually promised that WIPP is a pilot plant, hence the name. The DOE and other governmental agencies should have been planning other repository sites in other states. The deception that DOE is perpetrating is by: changing the way the waste is measured so that more panels have to be excavated, adding new types of waste and new sources from which that waste comes, and foremost, like in Edgemont and surrounding areas, not being honest and transparent with the public, most of whom do not know about the new risks DOE is planning on exposing them to. Ironically, like in New Mexico, one of the seriously injured areas is the Pine Ridge (Dakota) Reservation. Doing just a small amount of research reveals the inordinately high cancer rate in that part of South Dakota. My father, 2 brothers and likely my mother who died when I was 2 had some form of cancer. I have been diagnosed 3 times for various types of the disease. I certainly did not move to New Mexico to be confronted with the same calamitous situation.

The DOE is also being carelessly rash in projected transportation of surplus plutonium in a powdered form across 10 states, twice passing many communities for each shipment, and assuming that no accident will happen. This is ridiculous, as any adult knows. Any individual who has paid even a modicum of attention to national news reports of disastrous transports, Ohio et al, knows how absurd this suggestion is.

WIPP must close in 2024 as promised. The federal government sold the WIPP project to us as ending in 25 years. By attempting to keep it open until 2080 or worse, forever, the DOE has shown itself again as a master manipulator. This jeopardizes what little credibility remains in negotiating with other states as well as New Mexico in any future projects.