



News Release

Prevent Public Access to Former Plutonium Bomb Plant

Keep Rocky Flats Closed, RMPJC Urges Colorado's Leaders

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The Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center has called on leaders of the Colorado State Government to withdraw state support for the federal government's plan to allow citizens onto the future Rocky Flats wildlife refuge for recreational purposes and instead to keep Rocky Flats closed to public access.

A letter making that appeal has been sent to Colorado's Governor Bill Ritter, Speaker of the House Andrew Romanoff, and President of the Senate Joan Fitz-Gerald (see attached letter). The letter was signed by RMPJC's Nuclear Nexus Project and endorsed by its SpokesCouncil, numerous scientists, former Rocky Flats workers, environmental organizations and individuals who have studied and spoken out about the Rocky Flats site over the years, and the former foreman of the Rocky Flats Grand Jury, now a state representative. The list of endorsers is growing and will be posted for additional supporters at RMPJC's newly developed website at www.rmpjc.org, currently undergoing construction.

Background

In late June 2007, the Environmental Protection Agency certified completion of the "cleanup" done at the site of the former Rocky Flats nuclear bomb factory northeast of Denver. On July 12, 2007, the Department of Energy transferred nearly 4,000 acres of the Rocky Flats site to the US Fish and Wildlife Service which plans to operate this land as a wildlife refuge. DOE is retaining 1,309 acres of more contaminated land (including the site's former industrial zone) at the center of the "donut" of land that FWS has just received. FWS has already announced that it will open the future refuge for public recreation, despite overwhelming opposition from those who commented on this plan. Personnel from DOE, EPA, and FWS have called the Rocky Flats site "safe" for the public access intended by FWS.

Important reasons for skepticism regarding claims that the Rocky Flats site is "safe"

* *The Rocky Flats "cleanup" was driven primarily by cost (behind closed doors, a ceiling was set on how much would be spent).*

* *Plutonium-239, the contaminant of most concern at Rocky Flats, has a half-life in excess of 24,000 years (remains radioactive for more than 10 times this long) and can be harmful in very small quantities if inhaled, ingested, or taken into the body through an open wound.*

* *Partial remediation of the plutonium-239 present in the environment occurred for the top 6 feet of soil with no remediation below this level. Significant quantities remain in the environment.*

* *Existing standards for permissible exposure to ionizing radiation are inadequate because, as numerous recent studies show, any dose is potentially harmful.*

* *Standards for permissible exposure aren't calculated to protect the most vulnerable members of the population, such as the children likely to visit a wildlife refuge and to play in the dirt there, perhaps skinning knees or elbows. A recent British study indicates that standards for exposure to plutonium may be at least 10 times too high.*

* *The Rocky Flats "cleanup" was based on incomplete information, including the following:*

a. Evidence of environmental lawbreaking collected in the 1989 FBI raid of Rocky Flats was not available to those doing the "cleanup" because it had been sealed by order of the court.

b. Former Rocky Flats worker Jacque Brever, who left her job as a bomb maker to become an environmental scientist demonstrated that a highly contaminated portion of the Rocky Flats site was not cleaned up because DOE provided false information to the regulators and ignored "hot spots" that had not been addressed.

c. An unprecedented 1996 study done at Rocky Flats shows that plutonium left in the environment is being constantly recirculated by animals that burrow to a depth of 12 to 16 feet. They take surface material down and bring subsurface material up, disturbing as much as 12% of surface soil at Rocky Flats in any given year. Ecologist Shawn Smallwood, who did the study, concluded that tiny particles of plutonium left behind at Rocky Flats will be constantly released and widely dispersed with unpredictable adverse health effects. His study was ignored by those who did the Rocky Flats "cleanup."

d. Empirical data of significant plutonium migration in the shallow subsurface environment at Rocky Flats during the unusually wet spring of 1995 were dismissed in favor of computer modeling that concluded that plutonium remains more or less stable in the Rocky Flats environment.

"Opening the Rocky Flats site to innocent people is playing with fate in a way that is wholly unwise and unnecessary," said LeRoy Moore, Ph.D., one of the founders of the RMPJC and a long-time leader in closing down the plutonium bomb trigger plant and in national and international efforts to prevent the development of any new nuclear weapons domestically and globally. He added, "The lessons of Rocky Flats and its still-contaminated legacy should be learned about by visiting libraries, web sites, and the future Rocky Flats Cold War Museum. The site itself though, under present conditions, should remain closed."