

House Bill 1348: Uranium Processing Accountability Act

Sponsors: Rep. Buffie McFadyen (D-Pueblo West), Sen. Ken Kester (R-Las Animas) and Sen. Bob Bacon (D-Fort Collins)

Why we need the bill

Colorado cities and rural communities depend on clean air and water and economic opportunities to provide a strong quality of life. Unfortunately, uranium processing operations in Colorado alone have cost taxpayers \$1 billion, weakened economic investment opportunities, polluted precious water resources, harmed the health of Coloradans, and killed wildlife.

In March 2009, the Cotter Corporation announced plans to reopen its Canon City uranium mill in 2014, even though it's still an E.P.A. Superfund site, and has numerous outstanding contamination problems. Energy Fuels has proposed the first new uranium mill in the U.S. in 25 years in western Montrose County.

Taxpayers and Colorado communities shouldn't be left on the hook for the pollution created by the uranium industry. HB 1348, the Uranium Processing Accountability Act, would hold the uranium industry accountable for its own mistakes and ensure Colorado does not subsidize those companies through tax dollars or incentivize pollution by saying actions do not have consequences.

HB 1348 has over 100 supporters including construction companies, bankers, water providers, farms and ranches, Republican and Democratic local elected officials, public health associations, doctors, and advocacy organizations.

About the Uranium Processing Accountability Act

1. Ensures that uranium operators take action and clean-up existing problems before they can apply to increase or expand onsite activities.
2. Protects taxpayers by allowing local government, stakeholders, and the public to submit written comments as part of CDPHE's annual review of financial assurance for clean-up.
3. Protects Colorado homeowners by requiring uranium companies to notify residents with registered water wells in close proximity to known groundwater contamination.

4. Helps prevent communities from becoming dumping grounds for out-of-state toxic waste under the guise of uranium processing by requiring strict license provisions when seeking to accept "alternate feed," or toxic waste from industrial or medical operations.

The one billion dollar taxpayer bailout

Clean-up of Colorado uranium mills has cost taxpayers more than \$950 million dollars according to U.S. Department of Energy statistics. Spending for clean-up is ongoing, and the U.S. DOE will monitor and manage these legacy sites in perpetuity. Millions more taxpayer dollars have been spent for clean-up under government contracts (including \$43.2 million at Uravan and \$2.39 million at Cotter through 2001).

Clean-up costs at uranium processing sites





▲ *The Paradox Valley, located in the western portion of Montrose County, could be the site first uranium mill built in the United States in 25 years.*

Threats to water, air, public health, and wildlife

- Uranium mills have left millions of gallons of groundwater unusable because of toxic contamination, and pollution levels have even been increasing recently at some sites.
- The U.S. EPA found that radon emissions from uranium mill tailings can pose a public health threat to residents living within 50 miles of a uranium mill.
- Uranium is a toxic metal, similar to lead but radioactive. Uranium exposure threatens public health and may lead to kidney disease, autoimmune disease, diabetes, reproductive and developmental issues, lung cancer, and death.
- Uranium operations can threaten wildlife by exposing birds and bats to toxic open pit tailings ponds and depleting or contaminating water resources. Some individual tailings pond sites are known to kill hundreds of birds in a single year.

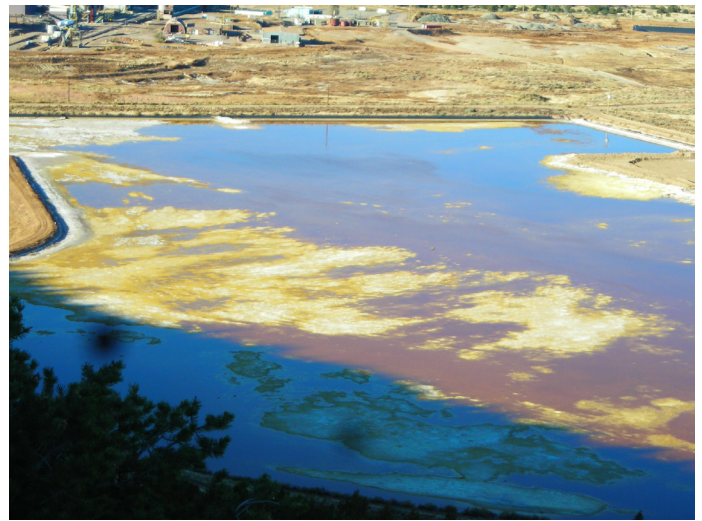


Cotter's track record

- The U.S. EPA has listed Cotter as a Superfund site for 25 years – the national priorities list of hazardous waste sites targeted for clean-up. Cotter was cited for 99 violations in the last 10 years.
- Cotter has polluted more than a billion gallons of scarce groundwater resources with toxic metals, including over 1 billion gallons with uranium and over 1.3 billion gallons with molybdenum.

That's enough to cover more than 4,000 football fields with a foot of water or provide water to more than 8,000 households in one year.

- In 2009, Cotter submitted its first plan to consider potential risks from thorium exposure which was first detected 15 years ago. Cotter will be looking into risks to school children at bus stops, joggers, homeowners, and golfers at the adjacent golf course.



▲ *Mill tailing waste pits at the Cotter uranium mill.*

- Cotter has had repeated problems with radon emissions and was cited for failure to properly employ clean-up plans of radon emissions.
- Cotter proposed \$23 million in clean-up and decommissioning bonds which could leave taxpayers on the hook given that past uranium mill clean-up costs in Colorado have ranged from \$50 to \$500 million.
- In 2008, Cotter pleaded guilty to a federal crime of killing 40 migratory birds from a single onsite spill and received a \$30,000 fine.
- Cotter investigated high levels of offsite groundwater contamination thirty years after its discovery. Cotter's proposal for remediation was finally submitted in December 2009.



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