

# Uranium Processing Accountability Act

Fact sheet updated 1/15/2010

## HR

**House sponsor:** Rep. Buffie McFadyen (D-Pueblo West)

**Senate sponsors:** Sen. Ken Kester (R-Las Animas) and Sen. Bob Bacon (D-Fort Collins)

### Why we need the bill

Uranium milling has a radioactive and toxic legacy in Colorado. Operations have polluted our air and water, devastated communities and public health, killed wildlife, and ruined our lands. In March 2009, Cotter announced plans to reopen its Canon City mill, even though it's still an E.P.A. superfund site and has other outstanding violations. The first new uranium mill in the U.S. in 25 years is being considered in the Paradox Valley of Western Colorado to mill ore pulled from the public lands in Colorado's red rock canyon country surrounding the Dolores River. We must learn from our past mistakes and update state law to match modern standards. The Uranium Processing Accountability Act would require any uranium processing facility to clean up its toxic mess before applying for new or expanding operations. This ensures scarce state resources will be allocated for the clean-up of existing problems.

### The one billion dollar taxpayer bailout

*Clean-up of Colorado uranium mills has cost taxpayers more than \$1 billion dollars.* The State of Colorado must match 10% of federal funds spent to clean-up uranium mills when uranium companies go belly-up and foot taxpayers with the bill. The Cotter facility, and any mills built in the state, will eventually be deeded over to the government for perpetual public care due to the radiation and hazardous characteristics of the wastes. Examples include: Climax in Grand Junction (\$504 mil.), Uravan (\$127 mil.), Rifle (\$119 mil.), Naturita (\$86.3 mil.), Durango (\$67 mil), Maybell (\$63.5 mil.), Gunnison (\$58.9 mil.), Slick Rock (\$50.4 mil.).

### Threats to public health & environment

- *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.

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### Cotter's track record

- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has listed *Cotter* as a *superfund site* for 25 years.
- Cotter was cited for *more than 100 violations in the last 9 years*. These violations include a recent citation for unconfined groundwater contamination containing uranium and molybdenum.
- Cotter has requested its current bonding for clean-up and decommissioning to be \$23.2 million. That amount is likely quite inadequate given past clean-up costs of other mills (\$50 to \$500 mil.).
- In 2008, Cotter pleaded guilty to the crime of killing 40 migratory birds from an onsite spill and received a \$30,000 fine.

### What the Uranium Processing Accountability Act does

1. Requires operators to comply with all clean up orders before new applications are processed.
2. Strengthens public oversight of bonding requirements for clean-up and decommissioning.
3. Requires operators to inform residents about threats to their water if residents have registered wells in close proximity to known groundwater contamination.

Requires operators to amend their operating license before accepting new sources of "alternate feed" (radioactive, toxic waste from other industrial or medical operations with recoverable minerals).

For more information, contact:

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