

Draft Testimony of Edith Hood

"Where I'm from..."

There is no place like *Dinétaah*, a place of the *Naabanis*. But if you are not from the Rez, you don't know the white dawn of morning, you don't know the clear blue sky, an autumn twilight and the twinkling stars of the night. Where I'm from, there are pinon-covered mesas, our beautiful and sacred mountains, sandy deserts. Where I'm from, in a place called Red Water Pond Road, there is also yellowcake, uranium waste, and sickness. I live about 12 miles north of Church Rock on the Navajo Reservation, between two abandoned mine sites.

I grew up with cultural teachings of a loving grandfather, a medicine man, a traditional leader. He taught us to respect Mother Earth for she gives us all the necessities of life. There is a Navajo concept called *Hózh=*. *Hózh=* is how we live our lives - it means balance, beauty and harmony between we, the Five-Finger People, and nature. When this balance is disturbed, our way of life, our health, and our well being all suffer. The uranium contamination and mining waste at my home continues to disrupt *Hózh=*.

I think it was in the 1960s -- I was only a teenager when strangers arrived. I remember Grandmother running to stop them from making roads into the wooded areas. The stakes she drove into the ground did not keep them out. No one ever told her what was happening. The exploratory drilling people had arrived. There was no respect for people living there, and certainly no respect for Mother Earth.

Today, as I pray in the early morning dawn, there is a man-made mesa of radioactive and hazardous waste about a quarter of a mile northeast of my residence. In the other direction, to the south about one thousand feet away, is another mound of uranium mining waste. At least the one to the northeast has some dirt on top; the one to the south has been left uncovered since it was created in 1968 and since the company stopped mining twenty-five years ago.

From my front yard I can see these waste piles. This waste seems to be piled everywhere. There are mountains of it - fifty, sixth feet high. This is the tailings or muck of pulverized uranium ore -- I don't know what else is in them.

They told us it is "low grade", that most of the uranium has been extracted from it. This stuff is spread by wind and water. We breathe it and live with it every day.

Our community continues to live under these conditions. The mining companies have gone, but there is still equipment and tools, concrete blocks, pieces of protective clothing, brattice cloths, bolts, mesh wire, and vent bags sticking out of the Earth, scattered about.

My family and relatives live among these sites. Children still play in the fields and ditches, among the rocky mesas, in the arroyo that once carried contaminated mine water. The sheep still get through the fence that is supposed to barricade these uranium mine tailings. We eat these sheep.

These places are still contaminated. I know because I learned how to survey the ground for radiation when our community got involved in a monitoring program in my area four years ago. I know because the government people told us it was. I watched as the EPA people dug up the contaminated soils from around the homes of my sister and other relatives this May.

I worked at the Quivira, also known as the Kerr McGee mine, 2000 feet underground with a geology unit. I was diagnosed with lymphoma in the summer of 2006. My father has a pulmonary fibrosis. My mother was diagnosed with stomach cancer. My grandmother and grandfather died of lung cancer. Many of my family members and neighbors are sick, but we don't know what from.

Today, there is talk of opening new mines. How can they open new mines when we haven't even addressed the health impacts and environmental damage of the old mines? Mining has already contaminated the water, the plants, and the air. People are sick and dying all around us.

Waste is seeping into the ground and may have already reached the underground water supply. I think about the shaft and vent holes that brought out exhaust from underground, were they cemented and sealed? If so, was the work done properly? If not, could there be poisonous gases escaping from these vents? Is the shaft acting as a passage way to the groundwater?

We need your help to clean up the mess that the mining companies and the U.S. government have burdened us with. We need help to stop mining companies from coming in and making a

new mess. We need to restore *Hózh=* so that we may live in balance and harmony with each other and nature as Navajo people, as *Diné*.