

**TESTIMONY
OF
JERRY GIDNER
DIRECTOR, BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
AT THE
OVERSIGHT HEARING ON
HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS
OF URANIUM MINING ON NAVAJO LANDS**

October 23, 2007

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is Jerry Gidner, and I am the Director for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) at the Department of the Interior. I am here today to testify about the United States' trust responsibility and the future involvement we may have with the uranium mine cleanup on Navajo lands.

The BIA manages approximately 56 million acres of land held in trust for individual Indians and Indian tribes in the lower 48 states and Alaska, including the lands of the Navajo Nation. The Navajo Nation, constituting approximately 27,000 square miles and stretching across the states of Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico, contains one of the largest uranium ore deposits in the world. For nearly 40 years – from the 1940s to the late 1970s – the United States Atomic Energy Commission contracted with private mining companies to produce uranium ore on Navajo Nation land in order to sustain the country's nuclear weapons development program.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has conducted a number of investigations and removal actions to address human health and environmental risks on Navajo lands. In doing so, the EPA works closely with the Navajo Nation and frequently with the BIA as a coordinating agency.

In addition, the Department of Energy (DOE) has statutory authority to assist with the remediation of uranium mill tailings pursuant to the Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act (UMTRCA). The DOE may assist in cleanup of mill tailing sites, including numerous "vicinity properties" contaminated by uranium mill tailings. The DOE has now completed its remediation of several uranium mills on the Navajo Nation and may only involve itself in associated groundwater concerns at this point. The Navajo Nation has also conducted site investigations and emergency response actions at uranium sites on Navajo Nation lands.

The Department of the Interior's Office of Surface Mining (OSM) has provided funding to address some hazards at abandoned uranium mining sites pursuant to the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA). Consistent with the trust responsibilities of the United States to the Navajo Nation, OSM and BIA have provided assistance to the Navajo Nation in sealing some mine openings and addressing physical safety hazards associated with abandoned uranium mines. The BIA is currently remediating the Tuba City, Arizona landfill, located on Navajo and Hopi lands; the landfill is contaminated with radionuclides derived from uranium mining/milling, among other things. As we have done, we will continue to offer our assistance and services to the Navajo Nation

This is a government-wide response to the United States' trust responsibility on the Navajo Nation's lands. That concludes my statement, I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.