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Area residents oppose Cotter plan

TRACY HARMON
The Pueblo Chieftain

Opponents include cancer victims who fear uranium risk

(Color) Chieftain photo by Tracy Harmon

Lincoln Park resident Mary Moran stands near the contaminated Sand Creek drainage area. She is heading an effort to oppose the proposed reopening of the Cotter Corp. Uranium Mill.

CANON CITY _ Area residents are organizing opposition to the proposed reopening of the Cotter Uranium Mill in the Lincoln Park area just south of here.

Lincoln Park residents Mary Moran and Lynn Boughton say the mill poses a threat to health and environment in Lincoln Park. The two are urging area residents to sign a petition that contains 20 reasons why a license amendment should not be granted for the mill.

So far, nearly 200 people have signed the petition, Boughton said.

Cotter is seeking a radioactive-license amendment from the Colorado Department of Public Health. The amendment would allow Cotter to resume production of ``yellowcake" at its uranium mill here next year.

The amendment would pave the way for plumbing and mechanical changes at the plant that would accommodate an alkaline-leaching process.

While Cotter Corporation promises to run a much more environmentally friendly operation if it reopens, opponents are concerned that Cotter still has not owned up to its legacy

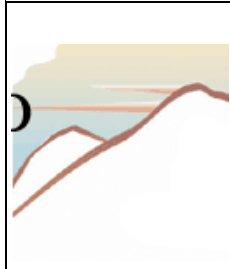


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of the 1960s, '70s and '80s by finishing off-site cleanup efforts.

The mill has not been in full production since 1987 when it closed due to a drop in price for yellowcake uranium. Cotter came under fire from the community in 1988 when the mill was identified by the Environmental Protection Agency as a SuperFund cleanup site.

A total of 532 Lincoln Park residents sued Cotter Corp. asking for \$500 million, claiming exposure to uranium via airborne particles and ground water contamination caused health problems. In 1994, five plaintiffs were awarded \$220,722.

Lawsuits involving the remaining 500-plus plaintiffs are still pending. The SuperFund cleanup effort is ongoing.

Boughton, who has lived in Lincoln Park since 1958, worked for Cotter from the time the mill opened in 1958 until he resigned in 1979. He and his wife Deyon both have cancer.

Mrs. Moran has lived in Lincoln Park since 1979. She and two close neighbors all have cancer.

Boughton said he can name 13 people with cancer who live within a one block radius of each other in Lincoln Park.

Mrs. Moran said she sees a "surprising number" of Canon City patients visiting the oncologist's office where she is undergoing radiation treatments.

She said three of the Lincoln Park residents involved in the lawsuit died in a one-week time span.

"I don't feel like we should be exposed again," Mrs. Moran said.

"The wealth of a company should not be gained at the expense of the health of a community," Boughton said.

Since 1988, Cotter officials have done cleanup work and have taken measures to remedy contamination problems attributed to the mill site.

While Boughton classifies Cotter's efforts as "great," he is quick to point out that the efforts have been concentrated on Cotter property.

Specifically, Boughton said, Cotter officials still have not conducted remediation work in Prospect Heights and in the residential parts of the Sand Creek drainage area just below the mill.

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He claims those areas were contaminated with mill byproducts during a 1965 flood that occurred before a Soil Conservation Service dam was built near the Cotter mill in 1971.

"They'll say they aren't able to do the cleanup because they can't get access to the property. That's because they have no answers for people on how the cleanup will leave their property," Boughton said.

Boughton said he knows of residents who refuse access to Cotter officials because they fear the cleanup efforts will involve tearing up of fences, buildings and homes.

Cotter opponents will push for an impartial Environmental Impact Statement study, completion of the off-site cleanup and a new Health Risk Assessment, which they say was mandated by the court settlement.

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