



NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL

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Conservation Groups, joined by L.A. City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo, Sue Bush Administration Over Contaminated Santa Susana Nuclear Meltdown Site

Administration plan would allow housing on dangerously contaminated land 30 miles from downtown; decision could affect nuke cleanup nationwide

LOS ANGELES (October 21, 2004) - Conservation groups, joined by the City of Los Angeles, sued the Bush Administration today, alleging it broke longstanding commitments to clean up a radioactively contaminated nuclear facility in Southern California. The Santa Susana Field Laboratory, a federal reactor testing site near Los Angeles, housed ten reactors, one of which suffered a partial meltdown in 1959. Despite extensive radioactive and chemical contamination, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) announced last year that it was reversing a decade of promises to clean up the site according to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards. Instead, DOE intends to leave untouched 99 percent of the radioactively contaminated soil and then release the land for potential residential development.

According to EPA, the cleanup criteria chosen by DOE would permit concentrations of some radioactive materials in the soil 10,000 times higher than EPA remediation goals; concentrations so high they pose the risk of cancer for one out of every 50 people exposed. Nevertheless, once cleanup is complete, according to DOE, "future use of the property for residential purposes is probable."

The lawsuit, filed today in federal court in San Francisco by NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council), Committee to Bridge the Gap (CBG), and the City of Los Angeles, alleges violations of several environmental laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act and CERCLA, the Superfund law. It seeks to force DOE to conduct a thorough environmental review of the site and to clean up the radioactive and chemical contamination according to the highest standards.

Accidents, Spills, Meltdown Leave Deadly Mess

The 2,800-acre Santa Susana Field Laboratory is located atop hills between the Simi and San Fernando Valleys in southeastern Ventura County, approximately 30 miles northwest of downtown Los Angeles. For decades, the site was used to test nuclear reactors and rocket engines.

A reactor at the site suffered a partial meltdown in 1959 that scientists estimate may have released more radioactivity than the meltdown at Three Mile Island in 1979. Two other reactors suffered serious accidents in 1964 and 1969, when large numbers of nuclear fuel rods cracked. Radioactive contamination from decades of accidents and spills is widespread. Toxic chemicals such as TCE, dioxins, PCBs and heavy metals also pollute the site -by-products of rocket engine testing and nuclear activities.