



Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice

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NEW RESEARCH FINDS PLUTONIUM “HOT PARTICLES” ARE “PERVASIVE” IN SOIL NEAR FORMER ROCKY FLATS NUCLEAR SITE INCREASING RISK OF RADIOACTIVE EXPOSURE FROM INHALATION; ACTIVISTS SEEK PARKWAY PROJECT HALT TO PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTH

A new analysis of soil from near the former Rocky Flats nuclear weapons plant has documented widespread contamination by “hot particles” of plutonium. The research by Michael E. Ketterer and Scott C. Szechenyi from Northern Arizona University (NAU) concluded, “These particles are found to be pervasive in non-US Government land east of Rocky Flats, and it is reasonable to believe that ongoing wind transport is continuing to spread the contamination across open space used by the public, and toward residential areas.”

The study analyzed surface soil collected in in 2019 from the Jefferson County right-of way property immediately west of Indiana Street, in the proximity of the former east gate of the Rocky Flats weapons plant. Also investigated were soils collected in 2000-2002 from property east of Indiana Street on City of Westminster open space.

The researchers identified 40 “hot particles.” Their report noted, “Particles in this size range are referred to as respirable, indicating that they can be inhaled and lodged in lung tissue on a long-term basis. Plutonium dioxide particles contained within the lungs will release their alpha decay energy within a small volume of affected tissue, producing localized internal doses of radioactivity.”

Dr. Ketterer, Professor Emeritus of Chemistry and Biochemistry at NAU, explained the significance of the research findings, “The U.S. Department of Energy’s current soil standard for radioactivity cannot be considered protective of human health and the environment because it does not preclude the presence of PuO₂ “hot particles.”

“These new findings provide crucial evidence of the public health threat lingering from nuclear weapons production at Rocky Flats,” added Chris Allred, a spokesperson for the Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center (RMPJC). “Allowing construction projects there risks putting dangerous plutonium particles into the air neighbors and visitors breathe. That is why we are calling on local governments to halt plans for the Jefferson Parkway and Rocky Mountain Greenway.”

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A Summary and Fact Sheet about the new research are available on request.