ABSTRACT

TITLE:	The Price of Yellowcake: The Ecological and Human Health Impact of Uranium Mining in Church Rock, New Mexico.
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ABSTRACT: In the Navajo creation story, it was stated that the people of the tribe had to decide between two yellow substances, uranium or corn pollen. The Navajo people chose corn pollen. They would use it for traditional purposes to heal the people. It was also used to protect them. Finally, they were instructed never to touch uranium. Uranium was described as a serpent, and if it ever was touched it would bring evil, death, and destruction. On July 16, 1979 in a small community on the Navajo Nation in Church Rock, New Mexico, an earthen dam built to hold waste from an underground uranium mine and mill broke and released 94 million gallons of radioactive waste. The spill contaminated the environment, which included soil, water, and livestock and also impacted human health. The contamination leaked into the main water source used for farming and livestock. The local residents were affected along with people living 80 miles downstream. Proposals to reopen Church Rock and other sites on the Navajo Nation are being considered again by major corporations. The purpose of this research is to inform the public and local residents living in the area about the effects of uranium mining and how it destroyed not only the environment but also the livelihood and health of the people. This is a big concern because the possibility of another mishap or spill is likely to occur once again if more mines and mills reopen. If one of the largest radioactive spills that occurred in U.S. history does not provide enough reasons to cease mining then what will? There are other sources that can be used to create clean energy, for example renewable energy, a much safer alternative in protecting the environment and the people.