

The O'odham Rights Cultural and Environmental Justice Coalition, a grassroots organization of O'odham peoples from the U.S. and Mexico, and Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice, are outraged at the "assessment" just released by the United States Environmental Protection Agency of the CEGIR hazardous waste landfill proposed near Quitovac, Sonora, Mexico. The EPA sent this assessment to the Mexican government to aid them in their evaluation of the project.

The US EPA's so-called "Assessment of Potential Impacts to the United States of the CEGIR Hazardous Waste Landfill in Sonora, Mexico" is not only incomplete and inaccurate in many aspects, but is a blatant violation of EPA's environmental justice and trust responsibilities to Native Nations and their people.

The US government's own Executive Order on Environmental Justice directs the US EPA to consider environmental justice impacts in its own actions. The US government also has an explicit trust responsibility to protect the interests and people of Native Nations within US borders.

The US EPA's assessment completely ignores the devastating impacts a hazardous waste landfill would have on the culture, traditions, health and spiritual-well being of O'odham people, including those who are US citizens, for whom Quitovac is an extremely important sacred site that is central to their beliefs and spirituality. Both the Tohono O'odham tribal government and grassroots tribal members including traditional and ceremony leaders have made it clear to the US EPA, verbally and in writing, that the building of a hazardous waste facility near the sacred site of Quitovac would be devastating and unacceptable. The US EPA has clearly ignored this information from the O'odham Nation and tribal members, as their assessment merely mentions that Quitovac has cultural importance. The EPA's assessment fails to even mention that they have received significant information from representatives of the O'odham traditional and ceremony leaders, even though this information was given directly to the EPA by O'odham leaders.

In addition, the EPA's assessment also dramatically underestimates the potential impacts from possible accidents, explosions, toxic clouds and other air emissions associated with the proposed facility. Quitovac is only 12.9 miles from the proposed site, and any major accident or toxic pollution carried by the wind would have a strong potential for disastrous impacts on Quitovac and the O'odham.

Impacts on Quitovac would impact O'odham who are US citizens in numerous horrible ways, and the US EPA's assessment should have emphasized this and upheld this view. The negative impacts on the O'odham cannot be mitigated, and the proposed landfill must be sited in a different, safer and more appropriate location with improvements in its design and operational plan. The US EPA's environmental justice and trust responsibilities have been violated once again.

We call on the US EPA to amend its assessment to accurately reflect all the impacts on the U.S. from the proposed landfill in Mexico, including all the sacred site, cultural, spiritual, health and environmental impacts that have been brought to the EPA's attention. EPA's environmental racism to Indigenous peoples must come to an end, and helping to protect Quitovac is a place to start.

Signed,

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