



History of Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium

In 2005, Tina Cordova and Fred Tyler, with the help of the local community of volunteers, organized the Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium (TBDC). The purpose of this organization is to bring attention to the negative health effects experienced by the people living adjacent to the Trinity test site subsequent to their overexposure to high levels of ionizing radiation that occurred on July 16, 1945, with the explosion of the Trinity atomic bomb test.



For decades, the community has been dealing with higher-than-normal incidences of cancer and death. The organizers hosted numerous town hall style meetings in Tularosa, Socorro, Carrizozo, Albuquerque, and other locations to discuss what the community wanted and needed. In response to the feedback gathered during the town hall meetings, Tina Cordova created a health survey, which TBDC began to distribute. To date, nearly 1200 completed health surveys have been gathered from residents or former residents of Lincoln, Otero, Sierra, and Socorro Counties and/or their children. Meanwhile, people in other states, including parts of Nevada, Utah, and Arizona, who were classified as downwinders, were being compensated and given health care benefits through the federal Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) without having to prove that exposure to radiation from nuclear tests caused their illnesses. It became apparent that the Trinity downwinders, and New Mexicans in general, for some unknown reason were not provided the same benefits because they were not included in RECA. In 2015, Senator Tom Udall visited Tularosa to meet with downwinders.

The TBDC is dedicated to continuing three annual events, including 1) the candlelight vigil commemorating the Trinity test held each July, 2) a peaceful demonstration held in April, and 3) another peaceful demonstration held in October at the Stallion Gate of the Trinity site when the site opens to the public. The annual candlelight vigil is held in Tularosa where the community comes together to memorialize the people they have lost to cancer and other illnesses related to radiation exposure. This occurs on the Saturday closest to July 16th each year. During the Seventh Annual Candlelight Vigil in 2016, over 800 luminarias were lit in memory of community members who died of cancer or other diseases resulting from radiation exposure. On one day in April and again in October, the Federal Government briefly opens the Trinity site to visitors wanting to observe the actual bomb blast site. TBDC organizes demonstrations at both Stallion Gate and Tularosa Gate entrances to the Trinity site in order to peacefully protest the damaging effects of the Trinity atomic bomb on New Mexicans.

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) Recommendations

The Health Impact Assessment findings suggest that amending the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act to include the Trinity downwinders will potentially improve the physical, mental, and generational health of residents in Lincoln, Otero, Sierra, and Socorro Counties in New Mexico.





The Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium supports the provisions for:

- Including New Mexico as a downwind state and an ‘affected area’;
- Medical benefits “in the same manner and to the same extent as an individual eligible to receive medical benefits under section 3629 of the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act” (EEOICPA); and
- \$150,000 in a lump sum apology payment.

However, the proposed amendments are not sufficient. Recommendations to amend the 2017 Radiation Exposure Compensation Act should include:

- Apologizing to New Mexico residents;
- Removing the 30-day limited eligibility period [June 30, 1945, and ending on July 31, 1945] and creating an open-ended eligibility period for the Trinity downwinders;
- Removing the July 9, 2022, legislative sunset provision and extend the sunset provision to at least July 9, 2045;
- Striking the termination of the RECA Trust Fund in 22 years and extending it until 2045; and
- Providing recurrent annual funding for the RECA Trust Fund.

Excerpts/Testimonies

“My name is Henry Herrera. I am 81 years old. On the morning of July 16, 1945, (70 years ago) at about 5:30 AM, at the age of 11, I was helping my father fill the radiator of his truck with water when I witnessed the blast of what I call “the first atomic bomb.” I heard a very large blast and saw a very big flash of light. I got so scared I thought the world is coming to and end. Then I saw what looked like a large, big, black, giant ball of smoke. It was huge and moving, going higher and higher in a north easterly direction. At the age of 63, I became ill with cancer. I’ve lost my brother, a nephew, and a niece to cancer. Two sisters were cancer survivors.”

“I am Margie Guilez Trujillo, and I am third generation native of Tularosa, and I am a cancer survivor. There were 9 members in my family, six of us had cancer, and three died from this horrific disease. There are several members of my extended family that have also died from this disease, and there are third and fourth generation members who are fighting it now.”

“My name is Bernice Zamora Gutierrez, and I was born in Carrizozo on July 8, 1945 to Eugenia Lopez Rogers—eight days before the atomic bomb was detonated. Even though I was not raised there, the exposure to radiation has not bypassed my family. My mother survived skin, thyroid, and breast cancer. One brother had thyroid cancer as did his daughter, a second brother had pancreatic cancer, and my sister got thyroid cancer twice and pre-cancerous cells in her uterus causing her to have a hysterectomy as age 28. My daughter was diagnosed with thyroid cancer three times as well as ovarian tumors in her early thirties. I have an aunt who was born in Carrizozo who survived breast cancer and many, many cousins who have various other radiation exposure related illnesses.”

