

Nevada wants feds to pay for Test Site clean up

By Ralph Vartabedian, Los Angeles Times

The Nevada Legislature has taken the first step in demanding that the federal government make amends for massive radioactive contamination left by decades of nuclear weapons testing on a swath of desert the size of Rhode Island.

In a joint resolution, the state's Senate and House are asking the federal government to contain and mitigate about 300 million curies of contamination left in the soil and water of the former Nevada Test Site, about 75 miles northwest of Las Vegas.



The Nevada Test Site north of Las Vegas is full of radioactive rubble and craters.

Photo/Department of Energy

The Energy Department detonated 921 nuclear warheads underground before testing ended in 1992. An estimated 1.6 trillion gallons of water in aquifers under the site are radioactively contaminated with the byproducts of the bomb

tests.

The resolution will open the way for Nevada to demand compensation for the loss of its water resources, said Assemblyman Ed Goedhart, the resolution's lead sponsor. He said the resolution stemmed from a detailed examination of the radioactive legacy of testing that was published by The Times in November 2009.

"It is one of the largest contamination zones in the U.S., if not the world," Goedhart said. "If we are prevented from using our water resources, it is a taking and we should be compensated."

The Energy Department has said the contaminated water is moving very slowly downhill toward Death Valley National Park, but it could take thousands of years to reach any affected community.

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