

Joint Statement: Downwinders and Scientists on the Enduring Legacy of Harm from Nuclear Weapons Testing

July 16, 2020

On July 16, 1945 we entered the nuclear age. Scientists with the US government-sponsored Manhattan Project conducted the Trinity nuclear test in New Mexico, marking the first ever detonation of a nuclear weapon. In 2020, on the 75th anniversary of that test, we have come together as scientists and Downwinders to recognize the harm caused by this and other nuclear weapons tests, to urge that victims of nuclear weapons activities be compensated and provided with medical care, and to call for the enactment of policies that will build a safer, more just world free of nuclear weapons.

We now know that the Trinity Test had a profoundly negative impact on communities in the region. The US government claimed that the Trinity site was remote and uninhabited, but census data shows that there were [tens of thousands](#) of people living within a 50-mile radius of the site. The test produced fallout that fell for days and contaminated drinking water, crops, and livestock. It is now known that exposure rates in public areas around the test were up to [10,000 times higher](#) than currently allowed. [Residents report](#) increased rates of cancer and other illnesses relating to radiation exposure, causing severe economic challenges and generational trauma. [Infant mortality rates](#) also spiked sharply in the months following the Trinity test, after a steady decline over the previous several years.

Recent studies have exposed a [willful neglect](#) of the health and safety of residents, and shown that any assessments of exposure have been woefully [incomplete](#). Even though they knew the risks of nuclear weapons testing, the US government and scientists in the Manhattan project did not warn, evacuate, nor provide health guidance to impacted community members. Following the test, residents were never informed of the possible health impacts or given health care.

In the decades after Trinity, the United States conducted over 200 atmospheric, water, and space tests with similar negative consequences, mainly at the Nevada Test Site and in Pacific Island nations. Residents near the Nevada test-site were falsely [assured](#) that no harm would come from testing, and adequate studies of the environmental and health impacts of these tests have never been completed. In fact, the only significant study on these issues, though extremely limited and flawed, was actively [suppressed](#) by the National Cancer Institute for five years. In the Marshall Islands, the Atomic Energy Commission conducted medical studies through "[Project 4.1](#)" on Marshallese people without obtaining consent or even informing them that a study was being conducted.

This is a shameful history for both the US government and the scientific community, which justified the sacrifice and harm of certain people in the name of scientific advancement and national security. These harms have been disproportionately felt by already marginalized communities: Indigenous communities, poor and rural communities in the United States, and in the case of the Marshall Islands, previously colonized people.

In the 75 years since the Trinity Test, scientists have also [spoken out](#) against the dangers of nuclear weapons, [advocated](#) against their use, and produced groundbreaking research on their health and environmental impacts that has paved the way for compensation and recognition programs.

Downwinder advocates have fought for justice and called attention to the historical and present harms caused by nuclear weapons.

As we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Trinity Nuclear Test, scientists and Downwinders share this call to action, and put forth the following shared goals:

- Ensure recognition, compensation, and medical care for those impacted by nuclear weapons testing. We support the extension and expansion of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act to include communities previously excluded.
- Prohibit all explosive nuclear weapons testing. In the short term, we denounce the Trump administration's consideration of resuming testing and the Senate Armed Services Committee's efforts to fund such an endeavor. In the long term, we urge the United States to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.
- Reallocate some of the tens of billions of dollars spent yearly on nuclear weapons activities to instead fund programs that address the harms caused by nuclear weapons and other social needs. It is unacceptable that the government argues that there is not enough money to compensate victims of testing when they are planning to spend \$1.5 trillion on nuclear weapons over the next 30 years.
- Re-commit to the obligations of the Non-Proliferation Treaty to pursue, in good faith, disarmament and the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons.

Original Signers:

Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium

Union of Concerned Scientists

COFA Alliance National Network and COFA Alliance National Network of Washington

Downwinders, Inc

Federation of American Scientists

Idaho Downwinders

National Association of Atomic Veterans

Pacific Association for Radiation Survivors