

The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act: Human Impacts of our Nuclear System

How are communities in the US affected by the nuclear system?

- Downwinders are individuals who were exposed to radiation from the explosion of nuclear weapons tests.
- During nuclear tests, radioactive materials are released and the wind carries the fallout hundreds of miles away from the nuclear testing site exposing people in the surrounding areas to unsafe levels of radiation.
- Uranium miners were exposed to dangerous levels of radiation. Many of these mines are still open and continue to release radiation into, mainly indigenous, communities.

What is RECA?

- [RECA](#), or the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act, provides compensation to approved individuals that have illnesses caused by nuclear weapons activities.
- However, RECA is inadequately scoped for the number of people impacted by nuclear weapons in the U.S.
- Many people who suffer from radiation exposure due to nuclear testing, mining, production, cleanup, and storage are not eligible, despite the obvious impacts on their health.

How are downwinders affected by nuclear testing?

- Studies since the 1930's have shown a clear link between deadly illnesses, such as cancers, and nuclear radiation. In the 1960s, numerous studies on Uranium miners in the US found increased illnesses and deaths linked to exposure.
- A [1997 study](#) estimated that testing from the Nevada Test Site could have led to 11,000 to 212,000 thyroid cancer cases (only one type of cancer of the many caused by radiation exposure).
- Another study found that just the New Mexico Trinity Test likely caused up to 1,000 cancer cases.
- Since the government did not adequately measure the levels of human radiation exposure or start counting certain cancer deaths as attributed to radiation exposure until much after the initial tests, we do not know the true impact of these tests on downwinders, but it is likely higher than many studies suggest.



How was the US Federal Government responsible?

- The government internally acknowledged the risks they were taking with human health and knew that people downwind of nuclear tests would be exposed to more radiation than what was considered safe, yet they continued to test.
- In 1984, a federal court ruled that the federal government had been neglectful in monitoring exposure (exactly why many studies do not accurately reflect the scope of the problem).

How much funding has RECA provided?

- As of January 2021, RECA has paid \$2.44 billion to 37,757 individuals.
- This is a fraction of the annual U.S. nuclear budget.
- The amount of compensation has not changed over the past 30 years, despite inflation. This means that “Downwinders”, as currently classified, don’t even receive enough funding for one round of chemotherapy.

What does the future of RECA look like?

- RECA is set to expire in 2022 unless action is taken by congress.
- The most expansive RECA bill was introduced in [2019](#) and included extending RECA to 2045, expanding the downwinder eligibility areas, expanding uranium workers eligibility and increasing the amount of compensation.

Take Action Now!

- Support the reintroduction of a RECA bill with language that extends and expands the program
 - Sign up at BeyondtheBomb.org to be kept in the loop of actions you can take on RECA once it is reintroduced.
 - Share downwinders’ stories and uplift the work they are doing. You can find a great list of organizations and activists at nuclear-voices.org