

Make it Safe

In 1995 I was hired to work for the Nature Conservancy to direct 15 Americorp young adults in building a picnic ground in Uravan, Colorado, by the confluence of the Tabeguache Creek and the Dolores River. At that time I was 41 years old, lived a very healthy lifestyle, did rock climbing, mountain biking, swimming, hiking, gardening and skiing regularly. I owned 45 acres upon which I had established my seed company and tree and plant nursery business.

At the Tabeguache Preserve, we constructed an outhouse, a picnic table and benches, made trails, raked out areas for parking, put in a watering system and dug holes for putting in fence posts and for planting native plants. I brought my six year old son, Joss, with me. He especially liked to do the raking and the digging of the holes. I worked there for three months. At the end of that time, I started to have low back pain and I had trouble with my digestion along with a feeling of nausea. I vomited and occasionally vomited blood. I had diarrhea most of the time and sometimes with blood. I felt dizzy and fatigued and sick. I passed out occasionally. I itched. Sometimes in one place... many times all over. I was also coughing a lot, especially at night. I went to my doctor and he ran a blood test and gave me a general physical exam but didn't find anything to explain what was wrong. Later he ran a lung test and said that I had some lung damage, since I don't smoke and live in the country where there is clean air, it didn't make sense. I lost weight over the next months, getting down to 114 lbs, which at 5'6" my normal weight should be around 135 lbs. My color was ashen and I looked OLD. After five years of digestive distress my doctor determined that I had an ulcer in my stomach. I had a very difficult time functioning, working, or doing any of the above-mentioned outdoor activities for the next ten years of my life.

My son Joss had a bloody nose one day when we were working. He had never had a bloody nose before and his nose just suddenly started bleeding. I remember that well because it scared me. He has had nose bleeds very often since. He is now twenty years old.

A few years after working there I drove past where we had made the picnic ground and it was gone! I called my boss from the Nature Conservancy and asked him what happened. He said that the Colorado Health Department had tested the soil there and found it to be contaminated with radioactive wastes, probably mill tailings that people had put there for fill. They had been removed. It was where we had raked, breathed the dust, dug holes, sat in the dirt, and in general had a thorough exposure to the radioactive wastes. Not only that but we wore clothes and shoes home covered with that dirt, tracked it in our home, sat on our couch, etc.

In Wikipedia it states that radiation poisoning causes the following symptoms:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Skin burns (redness, blistering)
- Weakness, fatigue, exhaustion, fainting
- Dehydration
- Inflammation of exposed areas (redness, tenderness, swelling, bleeding)

- Hair loss
- Ulceration of the oral mucosa
- Ulceration of the esophagus, stomach or intestines
- Vomiting blood
- Bloody stool
- Bleeding from the nose , mouth, gums, and rectum
- Bruising
- Sloughing of skin
- Open sores on the skin

Your doctor will advise you how best to treat these symptoms. He may prescribe medications to help reduce nausea, vomiting, and pain. He may prescribe blood transfusions for anemia or antibiotics to prevent or fight infections.

Causes

The causes include:

- Accidental exposure to high doses of radiation, such as in certain occupations
- Exposure to excessive radiation for medical treatments (may include excessively high doses, excessive time of exposure, or excessive body areas exposed)

It is a known fact that radiation exposure can cause cancer and that most uranium workers in the past have died of some type of cancer.

Were my son and I suffering from radiation poisoning? We will never know. I became disabled and couldn't work for many years. Is the exposure to the radioactive wastes actually to blame for the disintegration of my health? Will I, my son, and the Americorps kids someday in the future suffer from cancer from that exposure? These are questions I do not know the answer to. But I do know people should know what they are getting exposed to. We need to do what we can to make our world safe. It's too late to do anything about the exposure I suffered, but there is no reason for places that are known to have radioactive contamination to be open to the public without that public being advised.

Thank-you for listening.

Please vote yes to Wes McKinley's bill.

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