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75 Years and Waiting: The Downwinders Perspective of the Trinity Test

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On July 16, 1945 the US Government as part of the Manhattan Project tested the first nuclear device ever developed in the world in the desert of south central New Mexico. The tens of thousands of people who lived in the immediate area were not warned before or after the blast of the consequences of living within the fallout zone. As a result the people were overexposed to large amounts of radioactive fallout. The US government has never returned to assess the damage done to human health as a result of the overexposure to radiation suffered by the people. Most of the people exposed were people of color, indigenous Native Americans and Hispanic settlers. Furthermore, the US Government set up a fund in 1990, the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) to compensate Downwinders of the Nevada Test Site. The Downwinders of New Mexico were never included in the compensation although they were the first people ever exposed to radiation any place in the world. For 75 years the people of New Mexico have been suffering with the health consequences while totally being ignored by the US Government although they were not only downwind of Trinity test but well documented as downwind of the Nevada Test site. In this presentation I will describe the test at Trinity and the unique qualities of the test that produced the heavy fallout which made it so damaging to human health. I will explore the lifestyles of the people in New Mexico in 1945 that presented the highest levels of exposure. There will be a presentation of what the Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium (TBDC) has documented from first hand oral histories about the day of the test in 1945 and the health consequences via the health surveying we've conducted. Last I will present what it has meant to be left out of the RECA and ignored for 75 years. Stories will be shared and examples made of the impact of being a Downwinder inside of a family that has suffered great loss and experienced many financial hardships because of the lack of support and access to health care.

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