

Rapid City Uranium Resolution Accepted

Associated Press

The State Board of Minerals and Environment reversed course and will accept for the public record a resolution from the Rapid City Common Council expressing concern about a proposed uranium mine in the southern Black Hills, city Attorney Joel Landeen told the council Tuesday at a special board meeting. Rapid City officials submitted a petition to intervene in Powertech's permit application and included a resolution detailing the council's belief that the proposed mine poses a risk to the city's drinking water. It was initially rejected because it was filed after deadlines had passed. More than three dozen people spoke out against the proposed uranium mine on the first day of a weeklong hearing on the project, saying the potential for pollution outweighed the economic benefits.

The proposed Powertech Uranium Corp. mine near Edgemont would use a method known as in-situ recovery, which involves pumping water fortified with oxygen and carbon dioxide into underground ore deposits to dissolve the uranium. The water is then pumped back to the surface, and the uranium is extracted and sold to nuclear power plants. Powertech officials say the method will not pollute groundwater.

"It is the most benign form of mineral extraction there is, in my opinion," project manager Mark Hollenbeck said Monday at the state Board of Minerals and Environment hearing in Rapid City. "We're not doing huge, open pits. We're not de-watering the aquifer."

Thomas Cook, a Nebraska man who says a uranium mine near Chadron has polluted one of his wells, said the health risks are too great. "In these highly complex systems, you can't suspend Murphy's Law — that something will go wrong," Cook told the hearing.

The South Dakota State Medical Association has passed a resolution opposing the project. "The (association's) support of the petition and its opposition to uranium mining in the Black Hills is based on concerns about the mining's potential harmful impact on the health of the public, particularly water supply contamination," association President Daniel Heinemann said in a statement.

Hollenbeck said the mine would boost the economy. "We're looking at about \$20 million worth of tax revenue for the state of South Dakota, Custer and Fall River counties," he said. "And then we're also looking at about 100 jobs for that area, and 100 good paying jobs in that area is extremely significant."

At least a dozen Edgemont residents on Monday urged the state board to approve a mining permit. "The technology is very definitely safe," said Clarence Anderson, who worked in Edgemont's uranium industry when it was active years ago.

The Dewey-Burdock mine, named for two abandoned towns nearby, would cover

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about 16.5 square miles and produce about 1 million pounds of uranium oxide annually for the next two decades. It also needs a permit for the state Water Management Board. That hearing is scheduled next month.

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