

County proclamation calls for day of remembrance for plight of area 'Downwinders'



Sherrie Hanna (Courtesy)



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A proclamation by the Yavapai County Board of Supervisors will bring attention to 1950s and 1960s residents of Yavapai County who may have been exposed to health

risks because of nuclear weapons testing in Nevada at the time.

The proclamation for the Day of Remembrance for American Downwinders will be among the issues on the board's agenda for Wednesday, Jan. 6.

The Day of Remembrance is set for Jan. 27, 2021, commemorating the day on Jan. 27, 1951, when the first above-ground nuclear weapons tests were conducted at the Nevada Proving Grounds, about 65 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

Over the decades, many people who lived in the western states in the 1950s and 1960s were adversely affected by the radiation exposure from the weapons testing.

Because of the prevailing winds that carried the contamination, the affected residents were termed "Downwinders," and are considered at risk for 19 types of cancer, including esophageal and breast cancer, as well as non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Prescott native Sherrie Hanna, a Downwinder herself, has been working for years to bring attention to the plight of those who were affected. Both her father, Ken Wayman, and her husband, John Hanna Sr., died of cancers linked to the radiation exposure.

Along with getting the word out about the risks, Hanna has also worked to let people from the testing era know about the compensation and exams that are available through the U.S. government's Radiation Exposure Compensation Act of 1990.

For affected Downwinders who contract one of the listed types of cancer, a benefit of \$50,000 is available through the federal government.

With the possibility that the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act will expire in July 2022 if it is not renewed by Congress, Hanna said it is important to let people know about the potential exposure and the available compensation.

Meanwhile, Hanna said she continues to work with Arizona's representatives in Congress to get the funding extended.

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