

# NO CONTAMINATION OF FEDERAL PRISONERS!

## Background On Florence, CO. Area Contamination

*Seven years after the permanent lockdown began at the U.S. Penitentiary at Marion, Illinois the Bureau of Prisons announced its plan to open a "new and improved" Marion in Florence, Colorado. Marion, which replaced Alcatraz as the end-of-the-line prison, incarcerates prisoners who have participated in work stoppages, written "too many" lawsuits, pursued their religious freedom, or otherwise stood up for their human rights. Notably, Marion imprisons more political prisoners than any other U.S. prison. Many of these same prisoners will be sent to the proposed prison in Florence. Florence prison will be the first Federal prison to be built as a permanently locked down facility. As if the brutality of this new prison will not be enough, its location Florence is about four miles from the notorious Cotter Corp., a uranium milling company which has contaminated the surrounding area with nuclear waste pollution. We in the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown (CEML) view the placement of the Florence prison as one more attack on the human rights of prisoners. Concerned people are urged to contact us to find out more about how we can halt the construction of the Florence prison.*



Cotter Uranium Plant with leaking tailing ponds.

This leaflet gives a brief history on what we know about the Cotter Uranium Plant, the main polluter in the Florence area. We have yet to fully uncover both the amount of radiation illness and disease which has been inflicted on the people living there, and just as importantly, the risk and threat of poisoning to future inhabitants. What we do know is that the risks are high, the Bureau of Prisons knows about them, and they are proceeding without any regard for human life.

### COTTER URANIUM PLANT

Cotter Corporation is a uranium milling company, owned and run by Commonwealth Edison of Chicago, Illinois. From 1958 until 1987 the mill processed uranium ore into material called "yellow cake." It then shipped this yellow cake to Commonwealth Edison for use in the company's nuclear utility industries. The Cotter plant is approximately seven miles away from the proposed Florence prison site.

### "MANHATTAN PROJECT" ORE

In 1967, Cotter purchased many thousands of tons of previously processed uranium ore which was originally used by the U.S. government in the production of the first atomic weapons. Studies of the ore have since shown that it possesses some of the highest levels of radioactive contaminants, Thorium 230 and Protactinium 231, known to humans. Concentrations of these elements are many times greater than those which are found in similar Colorado ores. After Cotter purchased the ore, they shipped it to their mill in rail cars. Studies of the soil at the depot show that large amounts of radioactive dust are present at the depot. The presence of this dust is most likely attributable to the transport of this "Manhattan Project" ore. Cotter did not document this "Manhattan Project" material in their inventory; but later admitted, in 1989, that they had milled this extremely potent ore.

## WATER CONTAMINATION

Cotter originally stored its tailings, the remnants of the milling process which still contain 10% of the original uranium ore and 90% of the original radiation potential, in a series of unlined tailing ponds. In 1981, Cotter acknowledged that these unlined ponds were leaking. It attempted to alleviate the problem by constructing a number of new, lined tailing ponds and moved the tailings into them. However, problems with installation caused these pits to leak also. The Remedial Investigation / Feasibility Study (RI/FS), prepared in 1985 documents that these ponds show that the tailings seeped into the underground water source. This water source runs down the mill and into Lincoln Park, just five miles away from the new prison site.

This water source now has major contamination by both radioactive elements and heavy metals and has been labeled "poison aquifer." It has posed many health problems in the area including reportedly high rates of birth defects and lymphomic cancer. The RI/FS further elucidates the problems already detected among domestic animals, wildlife, agriculture and fish. For instance, as early as 1962, farmers and ranchers began noticing that their cattle were getting skinnier and losing hair.

According to the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), an in-depth study on the Florence prison site, the water source for the prison is to be provided by the City of Florence, which currently gets its water from the Arkansas River. The EIS states that the Arkansas River "is subject to pollution which could render its water supply unusable." The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has stated that in its opinion the entire area is sitting on top of a large hazardous waste pond. Currently, the city is in the process of seeking an alternative water supply.

*The Bureau of Prisons is aware of these contamination problems. What are we to make of a prison system that is so willing to build a new prison in a place like this? We must stop the building of Florence in a wasteland of contamination. If we are to think of ourselves as humane we must work to halt this inhumanity.*

### ----- CUT THIS POLITICAL COUPON -----

----- Please send me more information on how I can be part of the campaign to halt the proposed federal prison in Florence, Colorado.

----- Enclosed is my check to contribute to CEML's work.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

## AIR CONTAMINATION

The second source of contamination is called the "aeolian contamination source." When the tailings separate from the ponds, the high winds which blow down through the canyon scatter the dust from the tailings over the towns and cities below. Also, after the old tailing ponds were emptied, the soil which had been underneath was left to dry out and migrate in the prevailing wind patterns. Experts on radiation diseases state that the contaminated dust is the most threatening and dangerous source of contamination. There is an estimate, by Cotter itself, that over 19.9 tons of extremely hazardous dust were released annually from the mill.

Under the Clean Air Act, the EPA promulgated standards, called National Ambient Air Quality Standards, NAAQS, for certain air pollutants. While Florence apparently is within five of the six standards (like carbon monoxide, etc.), it violates the NAAQS for particulates - micron and submicron particles of pollution which remain suspended in the atmosphere for long periods of time. This is particularly important because of the arid nature of the region, and the fact that the EIS itself notes that Florence is in compliance with all the NAAQS *except* "particulates" - or air-born pollution. "Due to the semi-arid conditions of the region, particulate concentrations resulting from dust carried by high winds is exceptionally difficult to control," the EIS warns.

Due to water contamination alone, the Lincoln Park area has been on the EPA's National Priorities List since 1984 and has been designated a Superfund site for contamination clean-up. However, the EPA's assessment of the extent of contamination does not include the wind source. The EPA did not attempt to study the problem. Even without the air contamination the area still become a Superfund site.

**COMMITTEE TO END THE MARION LOCKDOWN**  
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