

POSITION STATEMENT FORM

(Completed form to be provided to the Legislative Committee)

GENERAL SUBJECT AREA -- TITLE OF PROPOSAL:

RETAINING THE MORATORIUM ON URANIUM MINING

PROPOSAL:

Support retaining the moratorium on uranium mining.

SOURCE:

Environmental Quality Advisory Council

BACKGROUND:

In January 2012, EQAC adopted a resolution supporting the retention of Virginia's uranium mining moratorium, which was imposed statewide in 1982. EQAC's resolution is available for review at http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/eqac/resolutions/2012_january--uranium_mining.pdf. EQAC recognized that the impetus behind efforts to lift the moratorium was a substantial uranium deposit in Pittsylvania County that may be economically viable for mining, and EQAC noted in its resolution that mining of this deposit would have no impact on Fairfax County. However, the resolution also noted the presence of uranium elsewhere in Virginia, including locations within the watershed of the Occoquan Reservoir; the lifting of the moratorium could conceivably result in mining of these deposits at some time in the future.

At the time of adoption of its resolution, EQAC was concerned that there may be efforts during the 2012 legislative session to lift the moratorium; such efforts were deferred to allow further consideration of the issue, but EQAC is concerned that related legislation may be introduced during the 2013 legislative session. EQAC feels that the reasons for retaining the moratorium that were outlined in EQAC's resolution remain valid and therefore recommends that a position be adopted in the Board of Supervisors' Legislative Program supporting retention of the moratorium.

In EQAC's view, independent reviews are compelling in their observations that there are significant gaps in legal and regulatory coverage for activities dealing with uranium mining in Virginia. EQAC continues to feel that it would be premature to draft regulations pertaining to uranium mining without first addressing concerns identified by the National Academy of Sciences in its report. Also, the National Academy of Sciences and other sources, such as the General Accountability Office, have raised concerns about the lack of adequate financial assurance to address environmental cleanups that have been needed elsewhere following uranium and other mining activities. In the event that uranium mining caused an environmental problem, the cost could be passed on to the state of Virginia; taxpayers from across the state could be burdened with a very expensive cleanup.

The approval of uranium mining operations are complicated by a number of factors including the high cost of cleanup in the event of environmental releases of contamination and the operation of mining operations by companies that are owned by companies outside of the United States. In addition, the experience with uranium mining within the United States has largely been limited to western states with low rainfall.

Please note that EQAC has proposed two additional position statements this year, both of which EQAC considers to be of lesser priority to this proposed position statement. EQAC's second priority recommendation addresses third-party power purchase agreements for renewable energy while its third priority recommendation addresses reduction in the use of disposable bags. The latter is a recommendation to carry forward a previously-established Board position.

RECOMMENDATION:

(Do not fill out-- This will be indicated by the Legislative Director and County Executive)

POSSIBLE SUPPORT OR OPPOSITION BY ORGANIZATIONS:

(List any organizations or groups, if any, which might be in favor of or against the proposed position)

Support from environmental and civic organizations is expected for retaining the moratorium on uranium mining.

STAFF CONTACT PERSON(S):

(Provide name and phone number of County staff person(s) best able to provide any additional research or necessary information)

Noel Kaplan (EQAC staff liaison)
Environment and Development Review Branch
Fairfax County Department of Planning and Zoning
12055 Government Center Parkway, Suite 730
Fairfax, VA 22035

Phone: 703-324-1380

Fax: 703-324-3056

Email: Noel.Kaplan@fairfaxcounty.gov