

[S.2798](#) / [H.R.5338](#): Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) Amendments of 2021

RECA provides compensation to people exposed to radiation from U.S. nuclear weapons testing and uranium mining. S.2798/H.R.5338 would extend RECA and expand coverage to multiple communities exposed to radiation.

Congress recently passed a short term extension of RECA through 2024. While this is an important first step, we must still strengthen and expand RECA.

Background

- From 1945 - 1962, the U.S. government conducted over [200 above-ground nuclear tests](#). During these tests, winds carried radiation hundreds of miles away from the testing sites, exposing people in the surrounding areas to unsafe levels of radiation.
- In the late 1940s, [uranium mining in the United States dramatically expanded](#), driven by the production of nuclear weapons. Uranium workers were exposed to dangerous levels of radiation on the worksite.
- [Hundreds of thousands of service members](#) were also exposed to radiation through nuclear weapons testing and the cleanup of radioactive materials.

Impact

- International [studies](#) since the early 1900s showed a clear link between cancers/other deadly illnesses and radiation.
- [Beginning In the 1950s](#), studies on US uranium miners demonstrated increased illnesses, such as cancer, and deaths linked to their exposure.
- [A 1997 National Cancer Institute study](#) showed that nuclear testing caused tens to hundreds of thousands of cancers in populations downwind.
- The US government did not communicate the risks of these activities to [uranium workers](#), [civilians](#), and service members despite knowledge of these and other findings.

The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act

- In 1990, Congress passed RECA with broad bipartisan support. It provides one-time compensation to people suffering from illnesses linked to presumed radiation exposure.
- Those who are [currently eligible](#) include:
 - Downwinders (individuals who lived downwind of the Nevada Test Site) from certain counties in Arizona, Nevada, and Utah are eligible for \$50,000.
 - "Onsite participants" of atmospheric nuclear weapons tests (military or civilian) are eligible for \$75,000.
 - Uranium miners, millers, and ore transporters who worked in the uranium industry from 1942 to 1971 are eligible for \$100,000.
- RECA also provides funding for local health centers and nonprofit organizations to conduct cancer screenings and support individuals in filing RECA claims.
- As of [July 2021](#), RECA has paid \$2.44 billion to over 38,000 claimants, roughly 1,200 claims per year.
- RECA is very limited in scope compared to the actual number of people who were likely impacted by US nuclear weapons activities, leaving many victims excluded.

What would the RECA Amendments do?

- RECA is set to expire in 2024 unless Congress takes action. If this happens, whole communities will lose crucial coverage and cancer screenings, and many will never get the chance to apply.
- **S.2798 and H.R.5338** would expand the program to better cover those harmed, including by:
 - Extending RECA by 19 years
 - Expanding the downwinder eligibility areas to ID, MT, CO, NM, Guam, and all of NV, AZ, and UT, which were shown to have received high levels of fallout from nuclear testing, including from the Trinity Test and tests in the Pacific.
 - Extending the uranium worker eligibility period to better cover exposed workers; including additional categories of uranium workers
 - Expanding the number of compensable illnesses
 - Increasing the amount of compensation to reflect the costs of care and inflation, and allowing past successful claimants to receive the difference between their claim and the increased amount
 - Providing health care benefits

This bill has been referred to the Senate and House Judiciary Committees. It is sponsored by Senator Crapo (R-ID), Senator Lujan (D-NM), Rep. Leger Fernández (NM-03), and Rep. Burgess Owens (UT-04).