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- Local/Region
- Nation & World
- Business
- Sports
- Obituaries
- Community

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Rocky Flats visitors could receive warning

*John Fryar
Daily Record Denver Bureau*

Opinion

- Editorial
- Speaking Out
- The Civil Exchange

DENVER — Visitors to the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge would have to be warned they may be exposing themselves to radioactive residues and other hazardous materials, under a proposed state law that got initial House approval on Thursday.

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House Bill 1389 is Walsh Democratic Rep. Wes McKinley's second annual attempt to require signs and handouts to alerting people of the potential dangers he contends linger at the former nuclear weapons site, once its conversion to a wildlife refuge is complete.

McKinley was foreman of a federal grand jury that in 1992 recommended indicting private and federal officials over contamination at Rocky Flats. Prosecutors, however, settled the case with plea bargains.

HB1389 would require signs at all entrances to the refuge to advise the public that "some contamination may remain in the soil and ground water."

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Written pamphlets or audio recordings would have to be made available to give would-be visitors a lengthy set of statements about the plant's history, the cleanup effort, and the possibility that "radioactive and hazardous materials are invisible to the naked eye and may be carried home in dirt on shoes and belong-ings."

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Those materials would also have to state that "in light of the scientific uncertainties and the controversies about risk, members of the public considering a visit to Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge should de-cide for themselves whether the risks are acceptable to them and their families."

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Several House members, objected to the content and validity of the statements McKinley is seeking to require on the signs and in the handout materials.

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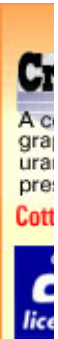
Arvada Republican Rep. Bill Crane, saying that Rocky Flats is "in my back yard." and said the materials and signs would have a long-term impact on the area.

Crane sought unsuccessfully to amend McKinley's bill to give the U.S. Department of Energy, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and a consortium of Rocky Flats' neighboring local governments a hand in drafting the messages to be disseminated on the entry signs and any handout materials.

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Lakewood Republican Rep. Matt Knoedler sided with Crane, saying, "Let the experts write it, not the state Legislature."



But Louisville Democratic Rep. Paul Weissmann scoffed at the idea of allowing area city governments have a say in crafting the visitor advisories.

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Rocky Flats-area local officials would prefer signs and pamphlets “that say ‘Bring your blanket and your Kentucky Fried Chicken and your guitar and have a good afternoon,’ ” Weissmann said.

McKinley’s HB1389 must be approved in one more House vote before advancing to consideration in the Senate.

Last year, a McKinley bill proposing “to protect the personal safety of visitors” to the Rocky Flats Wildlife Refuge died in the House Appropriations Committee before it could be considered by the full House.



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