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## Uranium mining to be studied

### Panel to consider economic, health and other impacts of tapping Pittsylvania sites

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A state panel is planning a study of uranium mining's impact on Virginia.

The Commission on Coal and Energy endorsed the study yesterday by a 12-0 vote.

The commission's chairman, Del. Terry G. Kilgore, R-Scott, said the study will look broadly at uranium mining's health, economic, social and other impacts.

"I want this study to be fair, and I want a lot of public involvement," he said after the meeting at the General Assembly Building in Richmond.

The commission asked Virginia Tech's Center for Coal and Energy Research to enter into an agreement with the National Academy of Sciences, or a similar institution, to conduct the study. The center and the commission will assist.

A subcommittee of the commission must approve an outline of the study before it moves forward.

A state House of Delegates committee killed a study proposal in March. Kilgore said his panel is probably the best group to oversee a study.

Mining supporters say about 110 million pounds of uranium, worth about \$8 billion, may lie underground in Pittsylvania County in south-central Virginia. They say mining the nuclear fuel would help address America's energy needs.

Opponents say wind and rain could carry radioactive waste to streams and crops.

Virginia has banned uranium mining since the early 1980s, when a similar proposal died amid community opposition and falling uranium prices. The market has since rebounded.

Cale Jaffe, a lawyer for the Southern Environmental Law Center, said mining in the U.S. is done in the dry, sparsely populated West.

"We are really going into uncharted territory" by considering mining in Virginia, he told the commission.

Whitt Clement, a former delegate and ex-state transportation secretary, spoke on behalf of Virginia Uranium Inc., formed by landowners who want to mine the Pittsylvania deposits.

These owners simply want a fair study of mining's impact, Clement said. "They don't want to do anything that will hurt their community."

Del. Daniel W. Marshall III, R-Danville, asked that the study go beyond the science of mining and into its effect on farms, property values and people's health.

Kilgore said those issues would be covered. "We need to leave no stones unturned on this."

The study could last up to two years and cost \$1 million, Kilgore said. He hopes mining supporters and opponents will fund the study.