

## Niagara Falls Storage Site News from the Corps

Sent: Thu 3/22/2012 5:24 PM

I'm writing you to address a recurring claim made by a few members of the community which inaccurately portrays conditions on the Niagara Falls Storage Site. This claim, which has been confusing when covered in the media, involves the performance of the Interim Waste Containment Structure (IWCS), and was first discussed with the community in 2010.

Let me assure you that the IWCS, which was engineered and constructed by the U.S. Department of Energy in the early 1980s, is functioning properly and is safely containing the radioactive materials stored within it. The Corps has applied the full strength of our scientific and engineering team to ensure public safety by evaluating over 25 years of environmental monitoring data for the Niagara Falls Storage Site to formulate to this conclusion.

The Corps is committed to protecting human health and the environment. We value community input and have listened carefully and spent considerable time, taxpayer dollars, and effort investigating this matter. We have, on multiple occasions, engaged the few community members who are making these claims. We find their claims, and their analysis of the same data we are looking at, technically incomplete and flawed.

The Corps scientific analysis is summarized below and the supporting documents, data and record of engagement with community members will be made available tomorrow on line at:

[www.lrb.usace.army.mil/fusrap/nfss/index.htm#IWCS](http://www.lrb.usace.army.mil/fusrap/nfss/index.htm#IWCS)

- The claims focus on a very small amount of data originating from 1 of 39 permanent groundwater wells regularly monitored by the Corps and from 1 temporary well point that was sampled during the remedial investigation. The permanent well in question is named OW11B and the temporary well point is named TWP833.
- Monitoring wells surrounding the IWCS are sampled regularly and serve as the first indicators of any change in cell integrity. There is no indication of increasing contaminant concentrations in groundwater which would be an early indicator of IWCS performance and integrity.
- The wells surrounding the IWCS show the low concentrations of uranium in groundwater remain constant or are declining. This indicates that there is no new or ongoing source of uranium entering the groundwater at these well locations. It also indicates the uranium entered the groundwater in the past and the uranium source no longer exists.
- Uranium concentrations detected in OW11B and TWP833 were evaluated in the Remedial Investigation Report Addendum [Sections 4.4.2 and 5.4] and the evidence clearly suggests the uranium being detected in these locations resulted from historic site operations. The Remedial Investigation Report Addendum is available on the Corps' website now.
- The claims that the higher levels of uranium in wells OW11B and TWP833 are coming from the IWCS do not agree with supporting data or the historical management of radioactive wastes at the NFSS.
- The claim that temporary well point TWP833 shows evidence of IWCS leakage is unsound because it fails to address the fact that this well point is located in an area where radioactive materials were stored in open piles for over 30 years and exposed to rain and snow which leached into the soil and impacted the groundwater being drawn into this well for sampling.

- Groundwater well OW11B is located at an elevation which makes the claim of leakage impossible. Groundwater flow and contaminant transport follows the physical laws of nature. Groundwater at well OW11B flows westerly towards the central drainage ditch and IWCS at very slow rates, therefore groundwater would have to "flow uphill" from the IWCS to reach OW11B. In addition, the transport of uranium in groundwater is over 100-times slower than the movement of groundwater because site soils can "adsorb" uranium as it travels in groundwater. Thus, the origin of the contamination in well OW11B is likely derived from a nearby sewer line that shows impacts from historic site operations (e.g., equipment decontamination). The Corps may have punctured this sewer line during investigative drilling and plans to determine that condition during 2012.

- During the construction of the IWCS all pipelines were cut and sealed and a clay cut-off wall and dike was installed around the entire IWCS to ensure there was no pathway for contaminant migration from the IWCS. It would defy the engineered purpose of the dike to leave abandoned pipelines running through it as claimed by those who state the IWCS is leaking.

The USEPA also listened carefully to these claims and performed its own independent analysis of our data. The USEPA agrees that the IWCS is performing as designed. To further address this matter, the Corps will perform additional field investigations in the areas identified to gather additional data and alleviate community concerns regarding the IWCS. The data developed from this field investigation will also assist the Corps with evaluating remedial alternatives as part of the future Feasibility Study for the Balance of Plant Operable Unit [i.e., all other areas outside the Interim Waste Containment Structure]. The work plans and sampling plans will be made available on our website prior to the commencement of field activities.

Again, I assure you that the IWCS at Niagara Falls Storage Site is performing as designed. I am committed to engaging the community through technically facilitated discussions as the Corps moves forward to develop the Feasibility Study for the Interim Waste Containment Structure Operable Unit of the Niagara Falls Storage Site.

Sincerely,  
Niagara Falls Storage Site and  
Lake Ontario Ordnance Works Site  
Program Manager