

[REDACTED]
Lewiston, NY 14092
[REDACTED]

November 22, 2011

[REDACTED] District Commander
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
1776 Niagara St.
Buffalo, NY 14207-3199

RE: Removal of Radioactive Residues or Wastes at the Niagara Falls Storage Site (NFSS)

Dear [REDACTED]

In the 1980's the Department of Energy (DOE) promised this community that radioactive material inside the Interim Waste Containment Structure would be removed within 10 years. The community felt it was being reasonable by agreeing to that timeframe. The federal government has broken that promise by 15 years, and has not even commenced removal.

The IWCS is already leaking: The Corps wrote that leakage would be occurring when there is "*steadily increasing detections in groundwater wells.*" While the Dept. of Energy took most wells out of the surveillance program shortly after IWCS construction 25 years ago, some recently reintroduced surveillance has produced clear data showing "*steadily increasing detections in groundwater wells.*"

A wet climate, high water table, seismic activity, and close proximity to residences and schools, in addition to the CWM Chemical landfill that has experienced, fires, leaks, chemical reactions, explosions and which has been fined for "inadvertently storing explosives," combine to make the NFSS an unacceptably high risk location for storing any radioactive material.

Groundwater pumping at neighboring landfills and clay mining operations has altered the direction of groundwater flow at the NFSS, making subsurface monitoring for leakage extremely difficult if not impossible. As a result, identification of all migration pathways from the NFSS into the community is virtually impossible.

In 2008, the NYS Dept. of Health identified nearly double the rate of childhood cancers among children living in our school district vs. state norms in a study covering a ten-year period.

Based on the complications and impacts above, clean-up for "unrestricted use" is called for.

It seems unrealistic for the Corps to assume that high activity and low activity wastes are today segregated inside the IWCS. Wastes were inevitably mixed during 40 years of multiple cleanups and excavation at the LOOW prior to storage in the IWCS. Moreover, DOE data suggests containment areas could have conceivably flooded shortly after construction¹ was completed in the 1980's. Furthermore, at variance with regulatory procedure, the Corps did not characterize wastes inside the IWCS during the Remedial Investigation. Therefore, a Record of Decision based on the hypothetical segregation and radioactivity estimates would seem irresponsible.

¹ Construction= a WWII-era basement repair, and clay capped only on top and sides to receive waste in early 80's

There are other problematic radio-nuclides inside the IWCS beyond Radium-226 and its decay products. The recent Corps technical memorandum acknowledged Knolls Atomic wastes were stored in the IWCS, but neglected to discuss either the quantity or type of wastes. Knolls reprocessing waste came from its nuclear reactor, and is composed of several radio-nuclides including Cesium-137, Strontium-90 and Plutonium.


If blended, the minimum Radium-226 activity, alone, of all material inside the IWCS is estimated at 5,000pCi/g. This very large volume of high activity waste should be stored or disposed in a dry climate, before the IWCS “dike” collapses under the weight of structural deficiencies in its design and “reuse” of a 70-year old basement, combined with seismic activity, exposure and infiltration that has since occurred (and may reoccur.)

It seems sensible to remove the NFSS property from the DOE burden on taxpayers because of its size relative to construction costs for long-term storage at the NFSS, notwithstanding the possible insurmountable risk factors. It took four years to remove the K-65 from Fernald. The cost of complications to monitor NFSS surface drainages, surrounding landfill impacts and the high water table for any contaminated material left behind, even in the short-term, may be high compared to a few extra months of disposal work to restore and close-out the NFSS for unrestricted use. Also, removal costs for soils may be small in relation to the total project.


A rail spur to the site would inevitably lead to the economic decline of villages, residential areas, attractions and schools if used to accelerate waste imports. Any investment of federal dollars in the high cost of a rail spur to the NFSS, merely to export what amounts to roughly four months worth of historical waste hauling into this area would also seem irrational.

Many government agencies are working to make this area a world class tourist destination. Purchase of second homes is a key component of tourism spending. With increasing NY and Canadian visitation to the area, we should seek to remove obstacles in between Niagara Falls, the Seneca Golf Course, the Jet Boat and Fort Niagara, the Wine Trail, Four Mile Creek State Park, charming villages, fishing charters, and breathtaking agricultural land with splendid farm stands. Expanding the available attractions around Niagara Falls is critical to attracting construction of more room inventory and to extending guest stays that, in turn, fuel economic returns for both government and private sector assets. The NFSS is a drag on economic development that can and should be removed, soon, before it destroys more assets or opportunity.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely, 



cc: Senator Charles Schumer
Senator Kristen Gillibrand
Congresswoman Louise Slaughter
NYS DEC Commissioner, 
NYS DOH Commissioner, 