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N-Waste Burial Among Options At Storage Site

By JOANN SCELSA

LEWISTON — Use as a repository for radioactive wastes is one of several options for the Niagara Falls Storage Site being considered by the federal government, a Bechtel National spokesman said Tuesday.

Robert L. Rudolph, project manager for Bechtel, the engineering firm managing remedial work on the site, said the options under study are stabilizing the wastes in place, removing them or turning the site into a repository that could receive radioactive wastes from all over the country.

Mr. Rudolph said that no recommendation has been made by Bechtel and no decision has been reached by the U.S. Department of Energy at this time on the future of the 192-acre site on Pletcher Road. A recommendation from Bechtel could come at the earliest during 1983 if the remedial program is continued.

A program has been submitted but has not yet been approved by Congress, Mr. Rudolph said. He said that after a recommendation was made it would take 18 to 24 months to go through the environmental protection process required by federal law.

The remarks came at a briefing session on the progress of remedial work for the Lewiston Town Board and the Citizens Oversight Committee appointed by Rep. John J. LaFalce, D-Town of Tonawanda.

Mr. Rudolph said the immediate objectives of the remedial program include controlling the source of radon and radioactive emissions and to pull back migration that might have taken place in the past.

BEYOND THAT, he said, no permanent decisions on the storage site's future have been made.

"There are no decisions on a permanent standpoint on Niagara yet," Mr. Rudolph said. "There just are not."

Earlier, however, Mr. Rudolph said the "DOE has 'made no commitment yet that I know of, but I can't speak for the DOE.'"

The latter remark was made in response to comments by Daniel J. Healy, superintendent of the Lewiston-Porter Central School District, which is located near the storage site.

"It's very nice to hear you're going to fix it up," Dr. Healy said. "But, if you fix it up too good, we could have another problem that could be of concern to the whole community."

TOWN COUNCILMAN Joan Gipp said she will not be entirely satisfied until all of the wastes are removed from the site. But she admitted that the cleanup of the site could ultimately be bad news for the area if it is the first step in turning it into a repository.

"I'll never be happy about (that)," Mrs. Gipp said of the possibility.

Councilman Richard Kolke also questioned, why, with 36 radioactive waste sites scattered around the country, the federal government is putting most of its cleanup money into the Lewiston site. Mr. Rudolph said such decisions are often largely "political." He said economics also play a part.

"Economics might have a bearing on it," Mr. Rudolph said. "It's a matter of trade-offs as to what gets done." I can't tell you the wastes will stay or the wastes will go."

Other factors that must be studies include the risk of moving materials as opposed to leaving them where they are, he said.

Meanwhile, Mr. Rudolph said, all of Bechtel's data indicate that radon gas emissions from the site either by air or water are within DOE and Environmental Protection Agency guidelines.

Local officials and residents have been concerned over possible hazards from leaking radon gas, which has seeped into the soil, air and water from deteriorating uranium ore residues left from the Manhattan Project, which created the atom bomb.

REMEDIAL WORK over the summer has concentrated partly on the stabilization of the R-10 residue and spoils pile, Mr. Rudolph said. The area has been capped with a rubberized fabric to seal out water and rodents and prevent emission of radon gas from the wastes. Run-off from the spoils piles is caught and treated.

A vehicle contamination pad also has been constructed to clean vehicles before they leave the site. The pad is equipped with a high-pressure wash down system. The wash water also is caught and treated.

Also, the roofs on two storage buildings have been removed and the roofs capped with impermeable covers.

He said no decision has been made yet on the storage silo, which also contains radioactive wastes. He said the silo is stable for the short-term (20 to 30 years), but no concrete will withstand Western New York winters over the long term.

Tuesday's briefing came as the result of a July letter to the DOE from the Lewiston Town Board asking that the board be kept informed of remedial work and other pertinent data regarding the site.

The letter also notified the federal government that the town would not be held liable for damages resulting from federal activity on the site. An Aug. 6 responses from the DOE, however, informed the board the government will not agree to hold the town harmless.