

Radioactive waste storage not an option for Lewiston

WHATEVER THE STATUS of a recommendation that the Lake Ontario Ordnance Works in Lewiston be turned into a central storage point for low-level radioactive wastes, suffice it to say that the seed for such a plan has been planted. So even though the foilage may have wilted, who's to say it won't spring back to life?

Lewiston officials, therefore, have adopted a properly wary posture and are organizing to fight the plan should it be revived. The degree of hostility, which, no doubt, is an accurate reflection of public sentiment, can be seen in Lewiston Town Supervisor James Lombardi's belief that "the residents of the Town of Lewiston should take up arms if that's what it takes to stop the government."

At issue is a recommendation by Bechtel National Inc., a consultant to the federal Department of Energy, that the LOOW site be used for disposal of radioactive wastes from seven other sites in the state. There is also the possibility that radioactive wastes could be imported from three other nearby states.

Edward Delaney, acting deputy director of the DOE's waste management program, told the Niagara Gazette that the recommendation is "tentative and based upon establishing the suitability of the site." He added, "We want people to know we aren't arbitrarily doing this without a great deal of consideration."

That is a different tune from what residents and town officials have been hearing. They have been led to believe that the site was to be cleaned up. There has never been any discussion about making it a depot for radioactive wastes from other areas.

Rep. John J. LaFalce now says he has been told by DOE that the Bechtel recommendation has been dropped. And Delaney, who earlier called Bechtel's recommendation "logical," now says that its conclusions were "premature" and "inadequate" because its report didn't examine the range of options for the other sites.

Whether that change in tone has been prompted by public outcry or by an official shift in policy, it remains clear that using the LOOW site for expanded storage of radioactive wastes is not an option Lewiston wants or needs. Niagara County, with two hazardous waste disposal sites — one of them adjacent to the LOOW site — is already overburdened with industrial waste. It is having a difficult enough time dealing with that problem. It doesn't need another one added to it.