

Letters to the editor

Fails to see logic behind plan for area nuclear waste dump

The recent proposal to establish a nuclear waste dump on Pletcher Road is a classic case of insult being added to injury. Niagara County already carries a burden of toxicity in excess of what any community should be expected to accept. To wit:

- The air we breathe probably qualifies us as one of the most polluted areas in the nation.

- The Niagara River and Lake Ontario are so contaminated that we are warned against consuming fish taken from their waters.

- A literal mountain of waste rises between Packard Road and Pine Avenue.

- The hazardous waste disposal of SCA Chemical Services, in spite of what is described as state-of-the-art technology, continues to experience "incidents" that are said to "pose no threat."

- Love Canal remains a fenced-off area unsuitable for human habitation, and a dozen or more other chemical or radioactive sites poison the environment in which we live.

Residents of Niagara County could no doubt easily extend this list.

Now, to add to a condition which already exceeds the limits of rationality, we are told that a federal consultant, Bechtel National, Inc., of Oak Ridge, Tenn., has recommended to the U.S. Department of Energy that the Pletcher Road site be expanded from its present 191 acres to over 1,000 acres, and that this land be used for the disposal of radioactive wastes from Ohio,

New Jersey and Massachusetts, as well as from other areas of New York. One thousand acres, incidentally, is a big chunk of land. It's over 12 times the size of Summit Mall, including the parking areas.

It should be noted that the radioactive waste presently at the LOOW site on Pletcher Road does not even properly belong to the United States. The 16,000 tons of material currently stored there is owned by a Belgian company, Union Miniere du Haut Katanga. We are storing the material according to an agreement which expires on July 1, 1983. The federal government is "negotiating" for ownership. Why we negotiate to obtain this costly and dangerous situation remains a mystery. If the waste belongs to UMHK, then they should be responsible for its safe and prompt removal when the agreement expires. If UMHK refuses to accept that responsibility, then sanctions against them should be considered. Diplomatic and economic pressure should be put on UMHK, and Belgium, if necessary. The U.S. has not hesitated to impose other sanctions for what it deemed irresponsible behavior; consistency asks the same in this case. If such action has not been taken — or will not be initiated — I am forced to conclude that some trade-off is involved. I'd like to know what it is. What are we getting in return for permitting UMHK to turn its back on 16,000 tons of radioactive waste? What are the people of Niagara County getting?

In the Oct. 6 report in the Niagara Gazette, the failure of good sense is demonstrated by Bechtel, and by Edward Delaney, acting deputy director of waste management for the U.S. Department of Energy. Bechtel says the removal of radioactive wastes from the LOOW site is inadvisable, or "unlikely," in part because of the dangers of transporting the material. This consulting firm has evidently failed to realize what would be obvious to a child: If the LOOW site is expanded, radioactive wastes will clearly be transported to it. What makes the transportation away from the area dangerous, but the transportation to it acceptable? That's a riddle worthy of Merlin.

Bechtel's commentary also states that cleaning up the site is "the least favorable disposition scenario." If cleaning up what we presently have (16,000 tons on 191 acres) is the "least favorable," there seems to be no "scenario" at all for 1,000 acres and the 80,000 tons (rough estimates, probably conservative) that will eventually be deposited there. The "scenario" then will be for us to live with it — and with the trucks that will be rolling the waste to us over the years. How's that for a "scenario"?

Delaney loftily states that, "It (expanding the LOOW site) is logical, although it may not appear logical to residents of the immediate area." The "logic" appears to be that Niagara County is already contaminated, so more won't matter. If this is not the

case, I am very interested in the logical process that resulted in the present recommendation. I challenge Edward Delaney to explain the logic in a clearly written, detailed letter to the Niagara Gazette. The people of the county have a right to that information.

Delaney also tells us that whether or not the site is used as recommended depends on establishing its suitability. If he defines suitability by soil conditions, water tables, and the like, he should be apprised of the concept that there are other more important considerations. The wishes of the people, their desire to live in as clean an environment as possible, should not be contemptuously ignored.

I'm familiar with the usual glib and insulting retort to "complaints" such as I am voicing here. It goes something like this: "What should we do with the waste then? We're generating it and something's got to be done with it."

The statement about waste generation is true enough. Of course we're generating it — and everything's got to go somewhere. My position is that we have had enough — perhaps it's time to draw back from my heady presumption that I speak for other Niagara County residents. I've been using the words "we" and "us" too much. I'll say this, though, and of this I'm certain: I've had enough.

Bob Baxter
Ransomville