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Feds dump Lewiston site

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The federal government illegally discharged 700,000 gallons of liquid waste into Lake Ontario from a radioactive waste storage site in Lewiston, state environmental officials charged Friday.

John Spagnoli, regional director for the state Department of Environmental Conservation, said he has directed attorneys to take "appropriate legal action" against the U.S. Department of Energy following the Nov. 11 discharge from the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works site in Lewiston.

The federal government has used the Lewiston site for the storage and disposal of radioactive materials since 1944.

Spagnoli said Bechtel National Inc., caretakers of the site for the federal government, asked permission on Nov. 9 to discharge the waste. He said permission was denied until Bechtel could provide further information about the quality of the collected waste water.

Spagnoli said Bechtel discharged the wastes into a ditch leading to Lake Ontario on Nov. 11 without permission from the DEC.

State Environmental Conservation

Commissioner Robert F. Flacke said in a letter to the Department of Energy Friday, "This release is a violation of (state discharge regulations) and, accordingly, I have directed John Spagnoli to initiate enforcement measures in this matter."

Spagnoli said Friday night he did not know what action would be taken against the Department of Energy until the apparent violation was studied by regional DEC attorneys.

"I'm just going to have to see what legal action I can take," Spagnoli said.

Spagnoli said the liquid wastes had accumulated in a storage lagoon during

wastes in lake

remedial construction work at the former ordnance site this summer. He said preliminary results indicated the wastes were not contaminated with radioactive materials.

Flacke said the state has asked for more analytical information on the liquid before Bechtel would be allowed to discharge the wastes.

Bechtel "has not responded to the department's request for information needed for issuing" the necessary permits, Flacke said.

Bechtel officials could not be reached for comment Friday evening.

Bechtel recently recommended to the Department of Energy that the 191-acre Lewiston site be converted to a regional radioactive waste repository.

Federal energy officials are currently reviewing that recommendation.

That recommendation has met with vigorous protests from area residents. The Lewiston Town Board recently instructed its attorney, Benjamin Hewitt, to investigate what legal action might be taken to block the conversion.

Federal energy officials originally talked of decontaminating the Lewiston site.