

## Keep Pledges on Waste

It is gratifying that the Department of Energy has rejected a consultant's plan to use the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works site in Lewiston as a permanent regional repository for nuclear wastes from New York and other northeastern states.

This welcome move would be more reassuring, however, if it did not coincide with disturbing indications that some officials of the same department have second thoughts about fulfilling major features of the federal commitment for permanent solidification of nuclear wastes at West Valley.

In the face of this development, officials in Niagara County and other opponents of the plan for enlarging the waste repository at Lewiston can be excused for guarding their optimism about statements disavowing that project.

In a letter to Rep. John J. LaFalce, D-Town of Tonawanda, Franklin E. Coffman, acting director of DOE's office of nuclear energy, advised that Bechtel National Inc., project manager at the site, has been told to halt study of its use as a regional disposal site.

In lodging protests against the Bechtel plan, Rep. LaFalce and Sens. Alfonse D'Amato and Daniel Moynihan reminded energy officials that the storage plan was in itself a "dramatic departure" from the plans put forward last year by the department to decontaminate and decommission the Lewiston site.

As the legislators pointed out, Western New York — as the location of the state's only two licensed hazardous waste disposal sites, the West

Valley Demonstration Project and eight former Manhattan Engineer District Atomic Energy Commission sites — already bears "more than its fair share of the state and the nation's hazardous and radioactive waste-management burden."

In the case of West Valley, DOE Inspector General James R. Richards has revived fears that the Reagan administration may be backing away from the Carter administration's agreement with New York State for federally sponsored cleanup of the high-level waste left at the former nuclear reprocessing center.

Under the law enacted by Congress, the federal government was to pay 90 percent and the state 10 percent for the cost of solidifying the waste and decontaminating the plant facility. Mr. Richards' report said that money could be saved by scaling down the demonstration. That would involve interim conversion of the liquid wastes to a form of sludge in place of permanent solidification and a bypassing of the legal requirement under the accord for decommissioning the plant.

One DOE spokesman has said that the government will abide by its commitments regarding West Valley. But in the absence of any official rebuttal, it is worrisome that matters that everyone thought were settled have been raised again.

There should be no question about any undermining of Washington's good-faith agreement, and concerns about West Valley can best be removed by an unequivocal disavowal of the DOE report.