

LOOW could be chosen

The former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works on Pletcher Road may not become a regional radioactive waste repository due to U.S. Department of Energy actions, but Northeastern states could select it for that purpose. Page 1B

States work out compact for waste disposal

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Residents in Lewiston need little reminder of the problems associated with low-level radioactive waste disposal: The federal government has used the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works for that purpose since 1944.

But the wastes in Lewiston are the byproducts of a different era, the military development of the atomic bomb during World War II.

According to government documents, Lewiston was selected by default. The wastes were pouring out of Western New York factories, and the idled ordnance plant was the only convenient dumping ground.

It started with the development of a bomb of unparalleled magnitude; it was the dawning of the atomic age. Soon there were nuclear-powered generating plants and submarines. Universities plunged into atomic research.

Meanwhile, the waste products contin-

ued to accumulate.

Nuclear reactors generated the high level, ultra-hazardous wastes. Hospitals, research centers and other nuclear facilities produced tons of low-level wastes annually.

Both categories presented difficult disposal problems. Many radioactive substances will persist in the environment, continuing as a potential health hazard for thousands of years.

Congress has debated the radioactive waste dilemma endlessly, failing thus far to resolve the toughest question — high-level waste disposal.

But Congress did resolve the low-level issue in late 1980. A bill was passed that turned the problem over to the states.

The states were told to find alternate means of disposal, because the two major low-level waste repositories in the country, Barnwell, S.C., and Hanford, Wash., would be closed to them in 1986.

Congress also recommended that states band together in "compacts" to es-

tablish low-level waste disposal centers on a regional basis, with the costs to be shared by the member states.

New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware and the New England states have discussed the formation of a regional compact for several months.

John Connolly, aide to state Sen. John B. Daly, R-Lewiston, represented the senator and the Senate at a recent negotiating session in New York City.

"They've got some tough decisions to make," Connolly said during a recent interview in his Pine Avenue office.

The states are now developing an agreement that must be ratified by each individual legislature. But, Connolly said, the most sensitive issue will come after the compact is formed.

"Ultimately, the tough question — sitting — will have to be decided," he said.

Once the compact is formed, a disposal site must be selected somewhere in the Northeast.

"And there's always the fear that you'll be the host state," Connolly said.

Might the ordnance works be a candidate for the new disposal center? Or will it be West Valley, south of Buffalo, where a low-level disposal facility operated until the early 1970s?

"I can't imagine any state wanting to take over LOOW with the possible liabilities (for wastes already there)," Connolly said.

But West Valley is another matter, in Connolly's view.

"My understanding is it's an ideal spot," he said.

Based on a draft version of the compact agreement, the landfill site will be selected by lottery, unless a state volunteers to host the disposal center.

Connolly said the goal is to complete the compact agreement and forward it to the 11 state legislatures next year, with site selection, planning, public hearings and construction completed by the 1986 deadline.