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'Radiation too high at LOOW, official says

LEWISTON — Radiation levels at the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works exceed state Department of Health levels, a state official says.

John M. Matuszek, director of the department's Radiological Sciences Institute, cited the federal Department of Energy's failure "over the past 20 or more years to reduce its radiation exposure limit for members of the public."

Matuszek said naturally occurring radiation exposes residents to an average 100 millirems a year. The DOE is completing remedial work at the site, which will reduce radiation levels surrounding the ordnance works to 500 millirems a year.

"Decontamination of offsite properties to a dose equivalent level of 500 millirems per year is really not acceptable," Matuszek said. His comments were publicized at last night's Town Board meeting by member Alvin Ogg.

"The DOE limit of 500 millirems per year appears unjustifiably high," he wrote. He said an acceptable state limit would increase normal radiation levels by 25 millirems a year.

Matuszek made his statements concerning the DOE decontamination work at the LOOW site at the request of state Sen. John B. Daly, R-Lewiston. He said discrepancies have resulted as a result of regulatory differences by various federal agencies, such as the DOE and federal Environmental Protection Agency.

"The state may agree to enforce federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission regulations ... DOE pays little attention to any of the others (NRC, DEC, EPA) and sets its own standards."

Matuszek said the increased radiation emitted from the ordnance works would only increase the average risk of cancer by about one in 1,000 over a lifetime.