

U.S. assumes ownership of LOOW wastes

The U.S. Department of Energy officially assumed ownership yesterday of 23,700 tons of radioactive wastes stored in Lewiston and Fernald, Ohio, wrapping up a cash and diplomatic deal with a private firm and the Belgium government.

The \$8 million agreement was signed by Joe La Grone, manager of DOE's Oak Ridge, Tenn., operations, and Victor Shick, president and chief executive officer of Afrimet-Indussa Inc. Afrimet, incorporated in New York State, is a Belgium-based firm that supplied uranium to the United States during World War II.

Under terms of the agreement, DOE will accept long-term responsibility for

about 14,000 tons of residues stored at the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works in Lewiston and approximately 9,700 tons at the Feed Materials Production Center in Fernald, Ohio, near Cincinnati. In return, Afrimet will pay the U.S. \$8 million, including \$763,000 previously paid in storage and maintenance fees at both sites over the past 25 years.

The money will be applied to costs associated with the long-term management of the radioactive material, DOE officials said. Government estimates for storage or disposal of the low-level Lewiston residues range from \$13 million to more than \$100 million.

Federal officials said earlier in a copyright article in the Niagara Gazette that the settlement included "defense considerations" from the Belgium government. Foremost was the Belgians' willingness to allow Pershing II and cruise missiles on its soil, should the U.S. and Soviet governments fail to come to an arms limitations agreement, officials said.

Meanwhile, officials said, long-term management of the residues and other radioactive materials stored at the Lewiston site is being addressed in an environmental impact statement now being prepared by the DOE. The DOE is expected to make its recommendations on contain-

ment and disposal options later this year.

Lewiston Town Supervisor James J. Lombardi was upset the community wasn't part of the agreement negotiations. "It's like a chess game," he said. "We were used as a pawn for some international agreement."

He said he fears the residues will be buried at the Lewiston site. "Our ultimate purpose is to have the stuff removed from here," he said. In the meantime, he said the federal government has "the moral obligation" to pay the town a minimum of \$250,000-a-year in lieu of taxes on the LOOW property.