

Report recommends end to burying toxic wastes

From wire, staff reports

ALBANY — A special state panel yesterday recommended policies leading to reductions in hazardous waste production and the ultimate goal of no longer burying toxic wastes.

The 16-member state Hazardous Waste Treatment Facility Task Force, appointed by Gov. Mario Cuomo last year, released its preliminary report on how state policy makers should deal with the toxic waste problem.

Under the chairmanship of state Environmental Conservation Commissioner Henry Williams, the task force is supposed to determine if adequate, technologically advanced waste treatment and disposal facilities are available in the state and to recommend hazardous waste policies.

State Sen. John Daly, R-Lewiston, chairman of the state Senate Subcommittee on Toxic Substances and Chemical Waste, said there was a need to build facilities to destroy and neutralize toxic waste.

"The ultimate solution to the hazardous waste problem," said Daly, "is to give New York state the regional capability to destroy, neutralize or recycle hazardous waste so that we do not have to put any more waste into the ground while still in a toxic state."

He recently proposed legislation that would establish a state plan to site and construct regional high technology hazardous waste facilities that would keep the wastes out of Niagara County landfills. The bill is in the Senate Finance Committee.

The basis of the revised bill which had passed the Senate in 1982 but lost in the Assembly would force regions to take care of their own wastes instead of shipping them to Niagara County, said Daly's counsel John Stuart.

"We would like to eliminate the situation in this state where everyone ignores the problem and Niagara County continues to be the dumping ground for New York State," Stuart said.

Daly's bill would set up a statewide commission that would study which areas could support a high-tech facility and which areas should be responsible for disposing of their own wastes.

High technology also would move the state, and especially Niagara County, away from landfills that could pose environmental problems 100 years from now, Stuart said.

"For four years," Daly said, "the Senate has attempted to put together a long-term state policy. The Executive Branch's answer has been to establish committees and the answer from the Assembly has yet to arrive."

Assemblyman Joseph T. Pillittere, D-Lewiston, also is busy re-introducing waste bills that would help Niagara County. He

said his pet project, which has passed the Assembly every year since 1981 but never gets off the Senate floor, would forbid the burial of highly toxic wastes. Instead, they must be incinerated.

Yesterday his Ban on Hazardous Waste Burial bill passed 23-0 in the Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee. It should be brought to the Assembly floor in the next few weeks.

The Hazardous Waste Task Force already had agreed to forbid construction of any more waste facilities in Niagara County, Pillittere said.

Concluding that there is existing technology to manage the hazardous wastes, the task force recommended a general state strategy "that emphasizes waste reduction first and foremost."

"Reuse, recycling and recovery of wastes must be the next preferred option," the task force said. "Treatment, detoxification and other destructive methods must be the third preference. Land disposal should be phased out as an acceptable method of hazardous waste disposal," it added, except for pre-treated wastes that don't pose health or environmental risks.

That strategy, the task force recommended, should be adopted through policy, law and regulation.

Williams said yesterday the task force is planning a series of hearings across the state to get public reaction to its report before it submits final recommendations to Cuomo and the state Legislature.

Members of the task force said more study was needed to find out how much hazardous waste is being produced in the state.

Williams said department engineers and consultants are examining all the newly required reports coming in from hazardous waste transporters, from industry and from the 400 treatment, storage and disposal facilities in the state.

A major task, the commissioner said, will be to predict future waste generation and treatment needs before any final recommendations can be made on the state's role in encouraging or providing additional treatment and disposal facilities in the state.

The task force also held off recommending any changes to the way the state reviews plans for the location and construction of a new treatment and disposal facility.

"Based on the data the task force has received to date, there is no readily apparent crisis related to treatment capacity and siting issues," the report said.

While Cuomo had ordered the task force to produce its final recommendations by March 1, 1984, the task force recommended a year delay in its deadline for the final report.