

Contaminated material may remain at LOOW site, cleanup official says

By JAKE HENSHAW
Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON — A key official for cleanup of nuclear waste at the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works said yesterday that the contaminated material could be stored permanently there, and need not be moved.

"The consensus of those dealing with it is that the (contaminated) material will stay right there," Charles G. Miller of Bechtel National, Inc. told a conference here on low-level nuclear waste cleanup. Bechtel has a contract with the U.S. Department of Energy for a short-term cleanup program at the site.

The comment comes as the final touches are being put on the draft environmental impact statement that will help identify a permanent solution for disposal of what Miller estimates is 180,000 cubic yards of contaminated material at the site in Lewiston.

According to Frank Coffman, director of the energy department's Office of Terminal Waste Disposal and Remedial Action, the draft environmental impact statement, which is being prepared by Argonne National Laboratory, is circulating at the Energy Department and could be released momentarily, but

probably will be made public in June or July.

In his remarks to the group, Miller appeared to suggest that the preferred alternative for disposal was to keep the material at the site. But in an interview later, he refused to confirm whether this would be the position of the draft statement, though he acknowledged knowing what is in that report.

Instead, Miller stressed that he was only giving the technical viewpoint and said that economic, social and other factors have to be taken into consideration before a final decision is made.

"The engineering solution is that it (contaminated material) can stay there," he said.

One alternative that apparently has been discarded is turning the site into regional nuclear waste dump. This possibility had been raised in 1982.

"There is no consideration being given to (a regional dump) anymore," said John Baublitz, director of remedial action programs for the energy department, who also spoke at the conference.

Right now, Bechtel is in the middle of a temporary cleanup program intended to concentrate all the nuclear waste

within a dike at the site where it will be sealed within several layers of material including clay, which should protect it for at least 25 years.

Miller said the estimate for this work is \$29.5 million through the 1985 construction season. Ultimately, he said, the work might cost another \$2 million.

This year, he said, Bechtel expects to spend \$4.5 million to \$5 million of this total, primarily to complete cleanup work on the central ditch that runs through the waste site and to transport 4,080 cubic yards of waste from a 169-foot high water tower to the containment area.

Beginning in mid to late June, the material in the water tower will be moved by a slurry line, a process in which the clay-like waste will be mixed with water and flushed through a pipe to the storage area. After the waste is removed, Miller said the tower will be destroyed and the rubble also placed in the containment area.

Miller said he hasn't previously used a slurry line on any project he's supervised. But he said other Bechtel executives who have assure him that it's a "piece of cake."

"I say, 'yes, but we got a funny frosting on this cake,'" he said.

Niagara Gazette 4/16/84