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Demolition of waste-filled silo to begin

By LISA AUG
Niagara Gazette

LEWISTON — The first step in the demolition of a concrete silo containing 4,000 tons of radioactive waste begins at the Lake Ontario Ordnance Works site today.

Workers for contractors Sicoli and Massaro Inc. of Niagara Falls will cut a 25-square-foot hole in the top of the tower to prepare for pumping the sand-like material out of the tower and into a storage area several hundred yards away.

Sometime after Aug. 1, they will install a hydraulic mining unit in the hole and spray water over the wastes so they can be pumped through a 4-inch pipe like a coal slurry.

The operation will continue for several

weeks into October or November. Once all the residue is removed, the tower will be demolished and buried with the wastes it has held for 40 years.

Since 1944, when the Department of Defense put radioactive residue from the project to construct the atomic bomb in the former water tower, the wastes have released gamma radiation and radon gas into the surrounding rural countryside.

For the past two years, since covering an open vent in the top of the tower, officials from the Department of Energy, which owns the 191-acre site on Pletcher Road, have assured local residents that emissions from the tower are within federal safety limits.

That limit says a person can absorb three units of radioactive measurement con-

stantly for a year without adverse health effects.

Joseph Nemec of Bechtel National, the caretaker of the site, said when workers removed the vent cover Monday, they measured an initial radon gas release of 20,000 units at the opening. Within an hour, however, the emissions were down to 15 units, he said.

Nemec says hourly measurements from Sunday through noon yesterday showed radon gas levels below two units at the base of the tower, at the property line fence 165 meters away, and at a spot 400 meters away.

He explains that radon gas disperses quickly in the air, so quickly that 30,000 units released from the top of the tower would dissipate to three units at the prop-

erty line less than 200 yards away. The dispersion rate depends on the wind; in still air, the gas would remain more concentrated.

Sierra Club physicist Marvin Resnikoff says technically, that is correct. But he said Nemec fails to point out that while the radon gas may be less concentrated away from the tower, it has not disappeared because it has spread over a wider area.

Nemec said Bechtel will check 98 air monitors on and off the site, including 52 surrounding the property in rings one mile and 2 1/4 miles from the tower.

Officials from Bechtel and the energy department will meet with the Porter and Lewiston town boards at 5:15 p.m. Aug. 1 at Lewiston Town Hall to discuss the work at the LOOW site. The meeting is open to the public.