

Final edition:

Niagara Falls, Lewiston, Youngstown,
Grand Island, Town of Niagara,
Cambria, Pendleton, Porter and Wilson

Niagara Gazette

Tuesday, August 28, 1994 —3A

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Partial removal of LOOW waste sought

By LISA AUG
Niagara Gazette

LEWISTON — The Lewiston Town Board has decided compromise is the better part of valor, and will not push for total removal of 250,000 cubic yards of radioactive material from the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works.

In a meeting with county officials last night, the board agreed to ask the federal government to remove the few thousand tons of the most radioactive residues and leave the bulk of the less contaminated material at the 191-acre Fletcher Road site.

"All of us would like to have it out of there, but it's not in the realms of reality," Councilman Al Ogg said.

In a preliminary environmental impact

statement, the U.S. Department of Energy, which owns the site, evaluated nine options for dealing with material, ranging from taking no action to transferring all the material to radioactive storage sites at Oak Ridge, Tenn., or Hanford, Wash. A public hearing on the document will be held Sept. 19 at the Lewiston-Porter Senior High School.

Although the department did not expressly favor one option over another in the document, it stated clearly that leaving the material in Lewiston would be safer and substantially less expensive than moving it.

The compromise option, labeled 4C, was hammered out in public hearings in Lewiston last summer. It proposes moving the residues, which represent 99 percent of the radioactivity on the site, to Hanford, and leaving the wastes in place.

"Do you want to ask for too much (total removal) and get nothing, or ask for 4C, something DOE can accept," asked Niagara County Legislator Lee Simonson, R-Lewiston. "Whatever you decide, the county will support you."

"I don't want to compromise," board member Joan Gipp said. "I'm sick and tired of the government using the best practical treatment instead of the best available treatment."

"I'm not naive enough to think we're going to win this," she said. "But it's our responsibility to take this position."

"Our input will be accepted most courteously by DOE and that's where it will end," member Richard Kolke said. "We will have very little influence on their decision."

"They'll come in here saying, how can we

con these people this time," Gipp said. "That's the way it's been all this time."

"Their minds are made up," Ogg said. "(The public hearing on the options) is almost an exercise in futility. We have to go with 4C."

Ogg agreed with Kolke that the energy department is not seriously considering moving the material, but the 4C option has an outside chance.

The compromise option was recommended by a Washington, D.C. law firm hired by the board in 1982 to represent the town's interests in the LOOW site controversy. The board, however, refused to renew the firm's contract last year, and Kolke, councilman Robert E. Lee and Supervisor James J. Lombardi opposed Gipp's motion to ask the firm for advice on how to approach the public hearing.