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Feds asked to remove part of LOOW waste

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LEWISTON — With more hope than conviction, area residents and officials last night asked the U.S. Department of Energy to remove at least some of the radioactive material from the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works on Pletcher Road.

"I don't have much faith in what they (the energy department) tell me, and I'm living proof of it," said Duke Williams, who lives near the site and who was subject to radiation during the 1946 U.S. atom bomb tests in the Pacific Ocean.

"Because they didn't maintain (the site) in the past, and I don't think they're going to maintain it in the future, I'd like to see (the material) removed," he said, to applause from the audience in the Lewiston-Porter Senior High School auditorium.

About 45 people attended the 70-minute public hearing on options for dealing with 250,000 cubic yards of radioactive residues and wastes at the site, and most of the 10 speakers mentioned the department's history of ignoring contamination on the property.

"Forty years of mismanagement gives me very little confidence in the DOE's long-term management plan," said Assembly-

man Joseph Pillittere, D-Lewiston, in a statement read by an aide.

"Completely removing all the residues and wastes is the only environmentally sound alternative," he said.

But in the statement, Pillittere said he bowed to pressure from Lewiston and Niagara County officials to support a compromise alternative to remove the most radioactive material and leave the less radioactive waste at the site.

The energy department has published a draft environmental impact statement detailing the effects of nine options ranging from doing nothing to removing all the material. According to the document, removing all the radioactive material would be by far the most expensive and most dangerous alternative.

The extreme unlikelihood of the department choosing that removal option was recognized by Rep. John J. LaFalce, D-Tonawanda, Lewiston Town Supervisor James J. Lombardi, Lewiston Councilman Al Ogg, Lewiston county legislator Lee Simonson and Dr. Richard Rooker of the Niagara County Board of Health, all of whom urged the department to choose the compromise option.

But Simonson warned the department not to interpret their compromise as surrender to the department's whim.