

# Metropolitan News

## U.S. to Pay for Clearing 3 Nuclear Waste Sites

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WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Energy will pay the full cost of cleaning up three nuclear-waste sites in the Town of Tonawanda.

The sites, two on the Ashland Oil Refinery property and another in the Seaway landfill on River Road, contain residues left by companies that made material used in the nation's first atomic bombs.

The decision to pay for cleaning up the three non-hazardous sites was contained in Department of Energy testimony released Saturday by Rep. Stanley N. Lundine, D-Jamestown, who is conducting congressional hearings into nuclear waste disposal.

The department's decision represents a policy reversal. Five years ago, Dr. William E. Mott, a high-ranking scientist in the department, said the department "generally lacks authority to clean up private sites with usually high radiation."

But testimony at the Lundine hearing revealed that the federal government has had clear authority to stabilize or remove from private property, radioactive waste from Atomic Energy Commission or Manhattan District projects since 1954.

At the hearing, the department also revealed:

✓ The estimated cost of the West Valley Demonstration Project, which involves clean-

ing up nuclear wastes at the former nuclear fuels reprocessing plant, has soared to \$472.8 million. In 1981, the project was estimated to cost \$280 million, and only last December the cost was pegged at \$381 million.

✓ Prospects appear to be dim for removal of radioactive waste from the Niagara Falls Storage Site at Model City.

✓ The department is studying the possibility of removing 30,000 cubic yards of nuclear waste buried in Colonie, N.Y., to a new disposal site in the state. West Valley is among the sites under consideration by the state.

The three Town of Tonawanda sites, first discovered in an aerial survey by the department in November 1978, have been included in the department's program of cleaning up nuclear-waste dumps created by old Atomic Energy Commission or Manhattan Engineering District projects.

The Manhattan Project is the code name given to the program to make the first atom bombs exploded at Los Alamos, N.M., and in Japan during World War II.

A fourth Manhattan Project nuclear waste site was discovered in the 1978 aerial survey of the Town of Tonawanda. That was at the Linde Division, Union Carbide, property on East Park Drive.

William H. Voight Jr., an aide in the Department of Energy, said he did not think

the Linde site is among those slated for federal cleanup.

The cleanup program is called the Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Project. About \$18 million a year has been allocated in recent Reagan administration budgets for this program. With the addition of the Town of Tonawanda projects, 25 sites are involved.

The highest priority site in the cleanup program is the Niagara Falls Storage Site, formerly called the Lake Ontario Ordnance Works.

The testimony of Assistant Energy Secretary James W. Vaughan Jr. suggested that the department has no plans to remove 4,000 cubic yards of nuclear residue left at Model City by the Manhattan Project. Roughly half the world's known supply of radium is there.

"A thick clay cap is being placed over the wastes," he said, "to prevent water infiltration and is designed to perform satisfactorily for 25 years."

Planned for the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1 is completion of the containment project and monitoring and maintenance. Consideration of other storage options is being deferred so the department can use its funds "for higher priority work."

Niagara County environmentalists had hoped the materials would be removed. The department had a contract with a Belgian corporation that used the site compelling the foreign company to pay for removal of the

wastes. But the Reagan administration canceled the pact under diplomatic pressure two years ago.

Reports at the time said the White House canceled the contract to help persuade Belgium to allow NATO missiles to be located there. But Belgium still hasn't allowed the NATO missiles on its soil.

Rep. Lundine said the West Valley cleanup project, set up to provide permanent storage of wastes produced at a nuclear fuel-cell reprocessing plant there, is six months ahead of schedule.

The abandoned reprocessing plant is in the congressional district represented by Rep. Jack F. Kemp, R-Hamburg, but was in Rep. Lundine's district when problems there developed.

The factory was dedicated 23 years ago by J. Peter Grace, chairman of W.R. Grace & Co., as the world's first commercial nuclear fuels plant. Mr. Grace sold it to Getty Oil, which later abandoned it.

Reagan administration budgetmakers initially resisted the cleanup project, attempting to transfer its costs to New York State. Critics of the project claimed its ultimate costs would be between \$850 million and \$1 billion.

The program was later embraced by the nuclear industry, and the White House has increased allocations for it every year since 1983.