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Radioactive Manhattan Project Waste Safely Buried

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LEWISTON, N.Y. — Forty-two years after World War II, a \$40 million project to clean up and bury radioactive waste left over from the Manhattan Project that made the first atomic bombs is finally nearing completion.

"There are a few, isolated hot spots," said Joel A. Arenson, project coordinator for Bechtel Corp., the clean-up contractor. "But all the contaminated soil has been removed. Essentially the job is complete. The containment is closed."

The 255,000 cubic yards of material is permanently buried in a clay-lined pit and covered by more clay and a 10-acre grassy mound 10 miles north of Niagara Falls. It includes radium 226, an isotope that takes 1,600 years to lose half of its radioactivity, and thorium 230, which has a half-life of more than 150,000 years.

The top-secret, \$2 billion Manhattan Project involved 125,000 people who worked on a crash program during the war at Oak Ridge, Tenn., and Los Alamos, N.M., to develop an atomic bomb before the Nazis could



William Hevrdeys, site manager for the Manhattan Project waste site, checks an air sampling device where a water tower once held the radioactive material. ASSOCIATED PRESS

make their own. The project culminated in the dropping of an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, on Aug. 6, 1945. The German effort was years behind.

Compared to that workforce, just two people will watch over the remains of the Manhattan Project after the last technician leaves the landfill site in 1989.

"We're getting ready to leave here. We're demobilizing the construction," said William E. Hevrdeys, Bechtel's site director.

The refining of uranium ore for fuel for the first atomic bombs left clay-like radioactive residue.

The first shipments of the waste came here to a then-7,500-acre government ordnance works four miles

south of Lake Ontario in 1944. No one is certain today why the site was chosen.

(Barbara Mulkin, public affairs director for Los Alamos National Laboratory, said only low-level wastes were generated at Los Alamos during the Manhattan Project. Those wastes were buried and remain at the lab.)

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