

Open house touts cleanup at radioactive waste site

By SUSAN MIKULA CAMPBELL
Niagara Gazette

TOWN OF LEWISTON — Area residents had a chance to inspect how well the government cleaned up radioactive waste during the Niagara Falls Storage Site's first open house Saturday.

Officials from the U.S. Department of Energy, contractor Bechtel National, and Rep. John LaFalce's Oversight Committee were on hand to answer questions at the site off Pletcher Road.

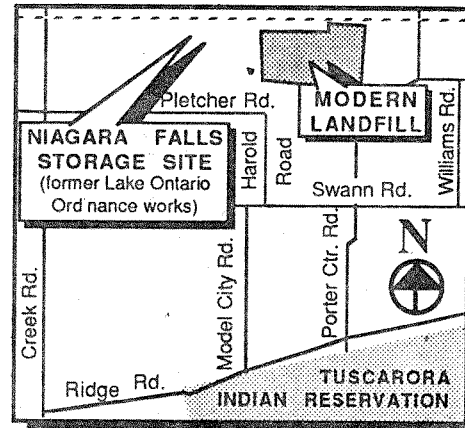
The \$41 million cleanup project, completed in 1986, stores some 250,000 cubic yards of contaminated material underground in a 10-acre waste containment facility.

Visitors were offered refreshments and shown displays and a movie about the site in a tent near the main gate, then driven by bus around the containment area.

There wasn't much to see other than a huge mound covered by grass tended by modern irrigation equipment, the pipes of monitoring stations, and the empty field once a holding area for contaminated water.

The 191-acre Niagara Falls Storage Site is a remnant of the 7,500-acre U.S. Army Lake Ontario Ordnance Works. During World War II and the early years of the nation's atomic energy program, radioactive residues and materials were stored at and shipped to and from LOOW.

Some material was eroded by wind and



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water, contaminating on-site and off-site drainage areas. Residues were stored in various locations and there were widespread areas of contaminated soil. Bechtel, the chosen contractor, began the remedial cleanup in 1982.

James Jackson of Lewiston said of the open house: "The people need to have public things like this where they let you in and let you know what's going on."

Barbara Jones of Lewiston said, "Since we live nearby, we'd like to know what's around us."

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As a real estate agent, she's found people ask about the safety of the area, so the open house was a chance to get answers.

Lewiston residents were not the only ones attracted to the open house. Carol Lindemann of Buffalo said, "I'm always interested in pollution. I just wanted to see what's going on."

The sloping containment area contains waste residue from the site and more than two dozen properties in the vicinity. It also includes the waste and rubble from the former 165-foot waste storage silo which was a Lewiston landmark since the 1950s.

Only about 6 percent of the residue in the containment area is actual radioactive waste, said John Schlatter, Bechtel public relations manager. "The bulk of it is what we call 'dirty dirt' ... soil that became slightly contaminated."

Visitors were shown monitoring stations, which ensure site safety.

The project has a turf management program, including special irrigation equipment and consultants, said Don Gamble of Bechtel. Deep-rooted grasses which might damage the clay cap must be avoided and good grass preserved to prevent erosion.

The containment facility has a life span of 25 to 50 years, but can be upgraded to a design with 200 to 1,000 years of effectiveness, officials said.