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Remedial work is resuming at atomic bomb waste site

By Carolyn McMeekin
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TOWN OF LEWISTON — The federal Department of Energy next month will start another phase of remedial work at the old Lake Ontario Ordnance Works, where waste from the development of the atomic bomb is buried.

The work is a continuation of remedial work performed from 1981 to 1986 that consolidated all radioactive waste at the Pletcher Road site into a containment facility. The site is now called the Niagara Falls Storage Site.

Since then, the energy department found that several areas did not meet its criteria for use without radiological restrictions. All but one of those areas were remediated during 1988 and 1989, with the waste put into two temporary storage piles on site.

Beginning approximately July 8, the department plans to remediate the remaining area and put its waste and that from the temporary piles into the containment facility, according to a letter the energy department sent to the town last week.

About 3,700 cubic yards of material will be added to the facility, accord-

ing to the letter from William M. Seay, deputy director of the energy department's former sites restoration division.

The work will not require the department to pierce the cap above the 10-acre underground facility, Seay said. Instead, the topsoil cover and 2 feet of the 3-foot clay cap will be removed from the northern end of the facility so that the new waste can go in. The new material will be covered with 3 feet of clay and 18 inches of topsoil.

That heartens Lewiston Supervisor Thomas E. Sharp, who is glad the entire cap is not being removed. "I have a great deal of confidence that what they're doing is proper," Sharp said Saturday. Still, he said he would have the town's two environmental attorneys review the plans and would discuss them with the Town Board at its meeting today.

Others are less confident. "All they're doing is moving it around," said Joan E. Gipp, a former Town Board member who once served on an oversight committee for the A-bomb site. "The solution is to dig it up and put it in steel containers. We

said that from Day 1."

James G. Jackson, a member of the environmental group Residents Organized for Lewiston and Porter's Environment, said he is concerned that radioactivity could leak into the area's groundwater.

The 191-acre site, also near Lutt Road, is part of the old Manhattan Engineering District used for storing A-bomb waste during World War II. After the war, more radioactive residues were taken there.

In 1986, the energy department decided that all 255,000 cubic yards of waste buried there should remain forever, even though its report said "the radioactivity will not diminish appreciably for thousands of years."

The new work will not include tainted areas located on neighboring property owned by CWM Chemical Services, a hazardous waste landfill complex. According to the Seay letter, those three areas are not accessible because they are under waste lagoons or berms. But they might require remedial work in the future if the present land use changes, Seay said.