

Letter To The Editor

DOE Reneges On Promise Regarding Clean-Up Process

The legacy of federal mismanagement and deviousness regarding the Lake Ontario Ordnance Works in the Town of Lewiston continues.

This site, originally constituting 7,500 acres of prime farm land, was appropriated in 1942 by the federal government to be used to build a facility to produce TNT needed in the war effort. In reality it became a dumping ground for incendiary and napalm bombs, TNT, phosgene, pyrophoric materials, liquid cyanide, 20,000 tons of radioactive materials and two pounds of pure radium (one-half of the world's supply). The latter materials have a half-life of 1600 years. The contamination of this site became the justification to issue permits to CWM and Modern Landfill.

Permits for dumping were issued with the advisory that "operations were to take place as secretly as possible in order not to arouse 'those conservation people'."

Pressured by local officials and environmental groups, the Department of Energy, responsible for the site, claimed that it was carefully contained and nothing was leaving it. Further community pressure forced testing, which proved that radioactive and hazardous materials were leaving the site through the ground, creeks, ditches and air. The New York State Department of Health branded the site as a "substantial health threat" in violation of New York State's sanitary code and DOE's own guidelines.

As a result, clean-up operations began in 1981. The community asked that the materials be stored in sealed containers above ground pending burial in an appropriate site. The DOE determined that the materials would be placed in an on-site landfill, admitting that it was inappropriate but placating us with "interim storage, good for 10 years." Now, seven years into this 10-year period, DOE is reneging on its promise, proposing that the

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landfill be capped and remain there forever. WPA and DOH argue that this is totally inappropriate, suitable for mill tailings but not for materials whose activity is 100 to 100,000 times higher. NYSDOH is in concurrence with EPA that the materials be placed in a geologic repository.

In 1986, the NYS Commissioner of Health wrote to the secretary of DOE, "Deep geologic repository will prove to be far less hazardous to public health than would surface burial at Lewiston, a location where periodic flooding would threaten serious levels of contamination of Lake Ontario, the source of drinking water for several million people in the United States and Canada."

The Department of Energy, despite strong opposition from the Department of Health, the Environmental Protection Agency and the community, is determined to take the easy way out and contaminate our land, water and air forever.

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