

HISTORY OF TOXIC SITE

■ Jan. 5, 1942: The U.S. government announces it will construct the \$32 million ordnance works for the production of TNT.

■ Sept. 28, 1942: TNT production begins, ending nine months later with the government's secret commitment to developing an atomic bomb in Oak Ridge, Tenn.

■ 1944: The U.S. Army announces it will use the LOOW site, now covering 7,500 acres, to store munitions and chemicals.

■ 1948: The Army transfers 1,511 acres to the Atomic Energy Commission and sells 5,000 acres to the public.

■ August 1949: The federal government reveals for the first time that Manhattan Project radioactive waste had been shipped to the site since 1944, and flatly denies any health hazard from the waste storage.

■ 1955-68: The government sells 1,298 acres of contaminated LOOW site property to private interests. Present owners include the Town of Lewiston, SCA Chemical Services, which operates hazardous waste landfills there, and Steven Washuta, who operates municipal landfills.

■ June 1982: Bechtel National, the energy department's consultant, begins cleanup work at the site, primarily burying contaminated material in concrete foundations.

■ November 1982: A study by a researcher at the State University at Buffalo finds cancer rates in Lewiston and Porter no higher than county, state and federal norms.

■ July 1984: Workers begin pumping the residue from the tower to a storage area a half-mile away.

■ August 1984: In a preliminary environmental impact statement on the site, the energy department estimates moving the radioactive material to storage sites in Tennessee or Washington state would be dozens of times more expensive and several times more dangerous than maintaining the material in Lewiston.

■ Oct. 23, 1985: The Environmental Protection Agency says the draft environmental impact statement did not present sufficient information on the geohydrology of the area or the ground water impacts of leaving the waste contained at the site.

■ May 24, 1985: EPA said it wants more technical/design information in the final environmental impact statement to show that on-site management of the wastes would adequately protect human health and the environment.

■ April 1986: Department of Energy issues the final environmental impact statement, which chose the alternative of long-term, in-place management of the wastes.

■ June 25, 1986: EPA states, "We find the (final) environmental impact statement inadequate" for determining whether the chosen alternative of on-site management is environmentally acceptable.

■ Aug. 27, 1986: The Department of Energy assures that, prior to starting final action, it will "provide EPA with assurance that the selected option will meet applicable standards and/or guidance and will be environmentally acceptable."

■ May 1, 1987: EPA says OK to the storage standards at the site for the projected 10 years of interim storage, but reiterates that they are not adequate for long-term, on-site management of wastes.

■ May 12, 1992: EPA writes to Department of Energy to restart communication on long-term handling of wastes.

■ June 22, 1992: Department of Energy responds that the radioactive residues have been adequately dealt with.

■ May 10, 1993: Department of Energy sent letter to EPA announcing plans for final capping of the waste at the Niagara Falls Storage Site.

■ June 24, 1993: EPA responds to May 10 letter that while it is not opposed to the long-term, on-site management of the waste at the site, it is opposed to the same solution for radioactive residues at the site.

■ Aug. 3, 1993: State Department of Health opposes installing a final cap at the site because it appears to make the site a permanent repository for the radioactive residues.

■ Sept. 28, 1993: State Department of Environmental Conservation "strongly supports" the position taken by the EPA.

Source: Gazette files, EPA status report on site, letters sent by and to government agencies.

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