

# Get nuke waste out of Niagara

**UNSAFE:** *Radioactive waste and residue buried in Lewiston should be capped using the best known technology, then the high-level residue should be removed to a national storage site as soon as one is built.*

It's out of sight, but not out of mind.

Radioactive waste from the Manhattan Project that created the atomic bomb is still buried at the Niagara Falls Storage Site in Lewiston. Now, it's a time bomb ticking away. The federal government says it has found a solution for which the safe technology has not yet been invented: Keep it here.

But frankly, we don't like it ticking away in our back yard — or anyone else's, for that matter.

The federal Department of Energy's "permanent solution" is to place a final cap on a quarter-million cubic yards of radioactive waste and leave it at the far east end of Pletcher Road — forever.

But that's not OK with another federal agency and two state agencies. The federal Environmental Protection Agency says the only solution is to dig up the waste and take it to a national, high-level radioactive waste repository. Trouble is, there currently are none in the United States.

That irony is not lost on the state departments of health and environmental conservation. They agree with the objection raised by EPA: The current standard in use at the site is insufficient protection.

In 1986, a clay cap was installed for 10 years of interim storage after a five-year, \$30 million-plus cleanup. At that time, workers removed a concrete silo that had contained 4,000 cubic yards of uranium ore residue considered the most dangerous and troublesome stuff on the site. What was in it got pumped underground along with the rest of the waste.

And that's the very stuff that defies a solution now. The ore, or K-65 residue, has a half-life of 1,600 years and is 100 to 1,000 times more radioactive than the type of waste usually dealt with under the current standard. The EPA says if, hypothetically, those residues escaped into the air, the dosages would be so high, one in two people would run the risk of developing cancer.

The energy department wants to install a \$15 million "long-term cap" that would guarantee safety for 200 to 1,000 years. The EPA says that's not long enough — go for a higher standard to ensure containment for 10,000 years. But that can't be done at the Lewiston site. Hence, the recommendation for removal — which is estimated to cost \$100 million.

The state DEC has excellent advice: Go ahead and build the new cap, but remove the K-65 residues once there's a suitable national repository.

Timothy Henderson, president of the group Residents Organized for the Lewiston-Porter Environment (ROLE), hit the nail on the head when he said the only way to make sure it doesn't leak and cause future problems for Niagarans is to move it. "Damn the cost. Consider the risks," is how he put it.

We agree with Henderson that unless the radioactive time bomb is removed from our midst, the federal government gets the cost benefit, and we in Niagara get the risk.

The energy department should cap the waste in the best way available under current technology — with a 1,000-year safety guarantee; but it should also guarantee fast transit out of here as soon as a safe national waste site exists.

ROLE attorney R. Nils Olsen Jr. also was right on the money when he said the process shouldn't go forward without informing the public — as a minimum.

The energy department, he said, "must make a full report to the public, to the towns and county as to what they're doing and why they're doing it."

Anything less is unfair — and unsafe.