

Danger level of radioactive waste debated

WHAT'S THERE?

Environmentalists and government officials spar over whether locally stored waste is low or high level.

By Mary Wozniak
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The question is: Is the Department of Energy on the level?

Inquiring minds want to know.

Timothy Henderson, president of Residents Organized for the Lewiston-Porter Environment, claims that back in 1983, the energy department quietly issued Order 5820, which reclassified the radioactive wastes at the Niagara Falls Storage Site in the Town of Lewiston as low level, thus enabling them to be landfilled.

That isn't true, a spokesman for the energy department says.

The energy department now wants to put a final cap, or an extra 4 feet of clay plus a layer of stone, on top of the clay cap covering the radioactive waste and residue, so it can be left there for 200 to 1,000 years. ROLE op-

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poses the plan.

So does the federal Environmental Protection Agency, the state Department of Health and the state Department of Environmental Conservation. They say the current standard in use at the site to contain the high-level radioactive residues is not good enough. The only answer, they say, is removing the residues to a high-level radioactive waste repository, when one is built.

The 255,000 cubic yards of radioactive material is from the Manhattan Project, which created the first atomic bomb. The Lewiston site is about 10 miles from the City of Niagara Falls, near Lutts and Pletcher roads. The energy department will hold an "availability session," which it likens to an open house, not a public hearing, at the site from 4 to 7 p.m. Thursday.

Please see **Danger, 4A**

NIAGARA FALLS STORAGE SITE

What's buried there:

- Roughly two pounds of radium, or one-third of the world's mined supply.
- 250,000 cubic yards of radioactively contaminated materials (soil and sludge).
- 15,000 cubic yards of high-level residues from the processing of uranium ores. Most significant of these is 3,200 cubic yards of residues code-name K-65 wastes, with a half-life of 1,600 years.
- The K-65 wastes have half-life of 1,600 years. That means half of its radioactivity will be gone after 1,600 years, but it will still remain radioactive for a period of up to 16,000 years.
- If, hypothetically, such residues escaped into the environment, the radiation dosage to people would be so high that it would result in a risk of one in two people developing cancer, the EPA says.

Source: *Niagara Gazette, Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, EPA, State Health Department.*

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