

Waste-site manager says radioactivity is normal

By RICHARD E. BALDWIN
News Niagara Bureau Chief

LEWISTON — Radioactivity detected at the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works is no greater than normal background radioactivity, according to the site manager.

Ronald E. Kirk, who manages the so-called Niagara Falls Storage Site on Pletcher Road in Lewiston, added that the clay cap enclosing radioactive waste and residue there "has a very good property for containing radioactive particles" and that the cap should last for at least 50 years.

Efforts to place a longer-lasting cap over the waste and residue are being held off, he added, until the National Academy of Sciences conducts an independent review of the plan. Some local residents have asked that the radioactive material be removed and taken to a disposal site somewhere else in the United States.

Kirk's comments came in answer to informal questions raised during a three-hour "availability session" last week attended by about 35 residents. Basically, he said, there have been no changes at the site or in plans for future containment there since the last

such session was held in January.

He said additional sessions, which are question-and-answer meetings, would be held about every three months. Representatives of a handful of public officials and the news media attended the Thursday meeting, along with the local residents.

Eventually, Kirk said, about 150 acres at the 191-acre site would be declared surplus, and the U.S. Department of Energy would try to dispose of it for possible development. A small section containing the actual 28-foot-high containment cell would remain under DOE control, and it would be watched perpetually for any sign of leaks, he said.

The site, which straddles the border between the towns of Lewiston and Porter, is a storage area for radioactive waste from the Manhattan Project, which developed the atomic bomb during World War II.

The DOE cleaned up most of the site and nearby properties between 1980 and 1986, placing radioactive material into the containment area. The department did further cleanup work in 1991, adding contaminated soil to the storage cell.