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Local News

Experts will view radioactive waste site

By BOB KOSTOFF
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A review panel of the National Academy of Science is expected to tour the radioactive storage site off Pletcher Road in the Town of Lewiston on Monday, May 2, and meet with area residents.

The panel of experts was formed on behest of U.S. Representative John J. LaFalce to study the decision of the Department of Energy (DOE) to put a permanent cap on the containment site rather than removal of the radioactive wastes and residues.

At a public session on April 21, site manager Ronald E. Kirk said the panel would be at the site on May 2 and set a meeting with residents.

John E. Baublitz, a DOE Environmental Restoration official, said DOE decided to ask for the review because of its difference of opinion with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) officials.

Baublitz said the difference centered around the category of the mixed wastes and residues and whether it should be permanently stored in the containment site or removed.

He said all planning of putting on the final permanent clay cap has been suspended until the review panel makes its recommendations. He said the panel was asked to analyze the DOE decision and, if it found that decision unacceptable, to recommend alternatives.

Although DOE does not have to follow the panel's recommendations, Baublitz said the DOE would give serious consideration to the panel's conclusions.

Environmental and governmental groups, including EPA, DEC and the state health department, believe the material should be removed, rather than capped and monitored, possibly for centuries.

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No new plans for Manhattan project waste removal, storage

Despite the wishes of Lewiston residents, it appears the efforts to have radioactive waste from the Manhattan project removed from its present location and taken to another site have gone unnoticed, as residents learned no new plans for the site have been discussed since January, Ronald E. Kirk, a representative of the Niagara Falls storage site on Pletcher Road, said.

During a special information session on the site, which is located on the border of Lewiston and Porter on Pletcher Road and holds waste from the development of the first atomic bomb in World War II, Kirk explained no changes have been made in the final containment plans for the site since the last information session was held in January.

Under the current plan for the site, a clay cap is placed over 255,000 cubic yards of material. That cap is supposed to last 50 years, Kirk said. He added, follow-

ing a review of the site by the National Academy of Sciences, a longer lasting cap may be placed on the site, but presently plans for the stronger cap are being held back until the National Academy of Sciences has a chance to conduct an independent review of the plans.

Eventually, 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 a 28-foot high containment cell would remain under the control of the Department of Energy and would be monitored for leakage.

Radioactivity at the dump site is no greater than normal, he continued.

Information sessions on the site, like the one held Thursday, April 21, will be held about every three months to keep area residents informed of the progress at the storage site.