

Outside scientists pay visit to nuke storage site

By Mary Wozniak
Special to the Echo

Harold Klingele of Lewiston on Monday told five scientists representing the National Academy of

Sciences what they had been bringing up themselves all day long.

He wanted them to look into the possibility of radioactive materials contained at the Niagara Falls Storage Site in Lewiston moving into

the area's groundwater.

Department of Energy officials say it won't happen because the naturally-occurring gray clay layer that lies beneath the radioactive material is uniform and highly im-

permeable.

James Rauch, a member of the Niagara Chapter of the Sierra Club and the West Valley Coalition, wasn't satisfied.

"In light of the fact that you find

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some discontinuities in the brown clay layer (above it), do you know there is 100 percent continuity in the gray clay layer?" he asked the officials.

Robert S. Andrews, a geologist staff officer of the National Academy of Sciences who accompanied the other four scientists on their foray to the Lewiston site chimed in. Could the gray clay have indentations or "sand lenses" that would act as pathways for fluid to move through rapidly? Brown clay has them, he

pointed out.

Thomas Burke, of the Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health, persisted. Have any "transport contaminants" from waste material been found in the upper groundwater?

None have been found in six years of monitoring the site, replied Ronald Kirk, the energy department's site manager for the Niagara Falls Storage Site. The department wants to put a final clay cap on the site.

It was all part of a day of information gathering for the subcommittee of the 14-member Committee on Remediation of Buried and Tank Wastes, which is ultimately connected to the National Academy of Sciences. The academy was contacted by the energy department to review the scientific data it used to come up with its proposed final cap.

The scientists are sponsored through the academy by the energy department, but they are independent of the department, said Robert Catlin of the University of Texas Health Sciences Center in Houston, who heads the subcommittee.

They will prepare a report with recommendations and send it to the department.

The Department of Energy, on the other hand, is not obliged to follow the recommendations," Andrews said.

VISITING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Robert Catlin, University of Texas, Health Sciences Center, Houston
- Thomas Burke, Johns Hopkins University, School of Hygiene and Public Health
- James Johnson Jr., Howard University, Dept. of Civil Engineering
- Raymond Wymor, retired chemist from Oak Ridge National Lab, Tennessee
- What's Next: Committee members will meet at least three more times before issuing a preliminary report in September. They may schedule another visit to the Lewiston site.

Lewiston Porter Echo