

U.S. agency is faulted over Lewiston waste site

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LEWISTON — The U.S. Department of Energy declined to take action to remove radioactive waste from the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works and instead changed the classification of the waste, an environmental leader said Thursday.

Timothy Henderson made the charge in a meeting held to respond to statements made last month by an Energy Department official who maintained that containment is a viable option for the amount of the material known as K-65.

Henderson, president of ROLE (Residents Organized for Lewiston-Porter's Environment), said that the government decided "if they couldn't get them (the material) out, they reclassified them to a low level." He said the arbitrarily set level was made equal to lead.

His remarks were made in response to statements made by Ronald E. Kirk of the Energy Department, who maintained that containment of the waste is the only viable option. The containment, Kirk said, would a clay cap and sides as well as continual monitoring.

Henderson said that in 1985 a government study acknowledged there is contaminated waste at the 191-acre site that straddles the border between the Towns of Lewiston and Porter.

"Mother nature hasn't changed since 1985," he said, "but government regulations apparently have."

He said that it was estimated that there were 10,000 tons of ra-

dioactive waste in the form of K-65 buried at the site, but it has grown to 250,000 tons as the result of having rain water added to the waste.

Henderson said the Energy department is a "lone wolf" when it comes to the assessment of K-65. He said even the state Department of Environmental Conservation has agreed that there is a danger of contamination at the former ordnance works. He cited a similar situation in Fernald, Ohio, where the DEC fined the Energy Department for failure to maintain safety precautions.

The ROLE president traced the history of the works site noting that the Energy Department has accepted a contract to "baby-sit" the site for 1,600 years. He said that the residents of Fernald pursued their case against the DOE and eventually got their site cleaned up.

Henderson accused the Energy Department of "coverups and misconduct." He said that it will be up to the residents to spur action.

"They (the DOE) have a lot of work to do to regain the public's trust," he said. "So we're the ones who have to set the agenda; we're the ones who have to ask the questions."

Henderson said the department should undertake the same program that they did in Fernald. That would be to remove the contents containing K-65, put it through a glassification process and ship the material to the Nevada Test Site for storage.

He advocated a health test be conducted in the area, particularly in the hamlet of Ransomville which "is downwind from the site."