

# Panel: Waste must go

## Residents cheer news

By Valerie E. Pillo

Niagara Gazette

TOWN OF LEWISTON — For years, environmentalists and Lewiston residents have voiced concerns about the contamination and long-term health risks from the Niagara Falls Storage Site on Pletcher Road.

Now they feel someone finally listened.

The National Research Council issued a report Monday, stating that the high-level radioactive waste buried at the Department of Energy storage site poses a long-term risk and should be removed.

"It's the first time I've heard a recommendation to have waste taken out of Niagara Falls," environmentalist Timothy Henderson said during a meeting Monday night with research council officials and residents. "It's gratifying. It's one for the people."

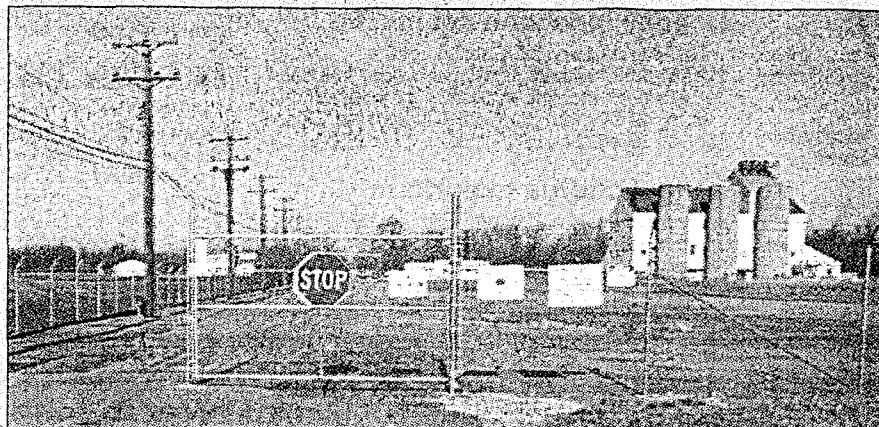
Henderson, president of Residents Organized for Lewiston-Porter Environment, added that the findings were "right on."

Environmentalist Joan Gipp also sees the report's findings as a victory for the people. "You've validated our concerns," Ms. Gipp said. "This is our first win."

While there are no immediate plans for removing the radioactive waste, there is a time element involved: the interim cap is only good for another 10 or 15 years.

"The public health and environment are protected by what's there now," said Robert Catlin of the National Research Council.

### TODAY'S TOPIC: ENVIRONMENT



James Neiss/Niagara Gazette

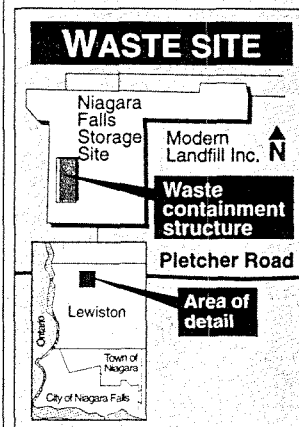
### NIAGARA FALLS STORAGE SITE

#### 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.
- The K-65 wastes have a 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.

A panel has recommended that high-level radioactive waste at the Niagara Falls storage site should be removed. The site is pictured above in 1993.



Niagara Gazette

## Lewiston storage too risky

By John Machacek

Gazette Washington correspondent and staff reports

WASHINGTON — High-level radioactive waste buried at the Department of Energy's Niagara Falls Storage Site in Lewiston poses a long-term risk to the public and should be removed, says a panel of scientists.

A DOE proposal to permanently "cap" the site, which holds residues from uranium used to build the atomic bomb more than 50 years ago, offers insufficient protection, according to a report issued Monday by the National Research Council, a division of the National Academy of Sciences.

Instead, DOE should consider a plan like the one it is using for treating and removing identical radioactive waste from another storage facility in Fernald, Ohio, said the council's committee on cleanup of buried and tank wastes.

The DOE study has been available for review for weeks, but officials were unable to agree on a response until Monday.

About 11,000 square meters of radioactive residues are stored in Lewiston. In addition, a large amount of other radioactive contaminated materials from uranium ore processing are buried at the facility.

Please see Lewiston, 12A

# Lewiston site called too risky for storage of nuclear waste

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Fernald, DOE is building a that will solidify the waste into small "glass marbles" for shipment to the department's Nevada Test Site.

The Energy Department has said such a transfer is possible because Fernald is designated as a DOE "defense" site. The Niagara Falls Storage Site is classified only as a "remedial action" site for uranium waste produced by the Manhattan Project, the code name for the atomic bomb construction.

"While there may be merit in such a distinction in the context of managing and funding DOE's vast waste management complex, (there is) little technical reason for maintaining the distinction in the case of managing" the Falls site and Fernald, said the National Research Council report.

The council, however, recommended that lower-level radioactive waste be left at the site under a suitable protective cap."

DOE officials Monday did not comment specifically on the report's recommendations or conclusions, other than to say they would "perform a thorough review" of them.

"We think it is encouraging that there is no immediate health risk," said Ronald E. Kirk, site manager for the former Sites Restoration Division of the U.S. Department of Energy Oak Ridge (Tenn.) Operations, one of several speakers at a public hearing on the report in Lewiston Monday night. "We're talking about a long-term situation."

However, no government body has to abide by the recommendations of the council's report. Only the U.S. Congress can enforce the recommendations, council officials said at the meeting at Lewiston Town Hall.

Rep. John J. LaFalce, D-Tonawanda, said in a written statement that the DOE was aware that additional study may be needed and was committed to do the necessary work.

"In light of this, along with the careful and thoughtful conclusions of this panel of expert scientists, I expect the DOE to implement all of these recommendations in a timely manner; indeed, I shall insist they do so," LaFalce said.

The council's study, requested by DOE, recalled that both Fernald and the Niagara Falls Storage Site received uranium waste from the Mallinckrodt Chemical Works, St. Louis, which extracted

uranium from ore in the 1940s.

While the residues at the Falls site pose no immediate health risk to the public, the council said it is concerned about potential contamination of ground water and soil in the future.

Not enough is known about "local geology" to be sure that "radium-laden water" will always be channeled away through layers of rock beneath the waste site, the report said. The flow of ground water also could be affected by pumping operations, which began five years ago at the nearby Modern Landfill facility, the report said.

DOE also has not looked at how the uranium waste could be affected by the potential migration of pollutants from Modern and Chemical Wastes Management's Chemical Services — another adjoining waste facility.

The report said there is no

evidence that the uranium waste is affected now. But chemical contaminants from the Chemical Waste site could break down waste containment at the Falls site, the report warned.

Gary Smith, president of operations at Modern Landfill, asked if there was a concern about adequate protection for the long term.

"There is a thick bed of gray clay under the structures," said Robert Catlin of the National Research Council. "It may not be perfect, but there is no concern."

CWM is subject to federal action aimed at confining chemical contamination of ground water.

"There is currently no routine testing done to monitor pollutant migration, which may impact the (Niagara Falls Storage Site), and little information available on the current or long-term health risks posed by these neighboring sites," the report said.

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## National Research Council report

Moving all or some of the uranium residues at the site to other DOE waste sites in Hanford, Wash., or Oak Ridge, Tenn., was among options recommended by a federal environmental impact study nine years ago.

But the study found the cost of excavation and shipping significantly higher than that of treating the residues and burying them permanently at the site.

Recent estimates show that the

cost of removing the residues has quadrupled to \$85 million if they were shipped to Nevada. The cost would be \$30 million if they were treated locally and then moved to one of DOE's national laboratories.

The council recommended that DOE wait before making a final decision. "Other more desirable alternatives for long-term disposal ... may have emerged" by then, the report said.