Waste site addressed

Corps takes control of radioactive site in Lewiston

By Ann McBride
Niagara Gazette

▶ **ENVIRONMENT**

LEWISTON — Taking what Lt. Col. Michael Conrad called the "first step in a long process," members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers came to Lewiston on Monday to discuss finding a solution to a decades-old problem — cleaning up radioactive waste left over from the creation of the atomic bomb.

The materials, stored at the Niagara Falls Storage Site on Pletcher Road, date back to the 1940s and the Manhattan Project. The waste was buried and topped with a temporary clay cap by the Department of Energy in the 1980s as part of the Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program (FUSRAP).

The DOE had administered the program since its inception in 1974, but it was shifted by Congress in October to the U.S. Corps of Engineers in a move Conrad called "unprecedented."

The majority of the 30 residents who came to Town Hall to meet the Corps' leaders were pleased the DOE was no longer the lead agency, but were still apprehensive about the new agency.

"I'm not encouraged at all so far," said Jim Rauch of Amherst, adding that the cleanup requires an agency with the proper regulatory control, such as the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Conrad said this is one of the key issues that remains to be solved as they assume control.

"We've had a lot of studies ... but nothing has been done for 20 years," said Harold Klingele of Niagara Falls.

Conrad said he plans to stick with the schedule set for this year, which includes removing low-level radioactive materials from two buildings and continuing with site monitoring. The Corps also will propose how it plans to involve the public in the process of cleaning up the site.

Conrad also said he was not comfortable with site security — "a fence with just a big bunker" — and he would like to see it strengthened. A study will be conducted this year, he said.

A 1995 National Academy of Sciences study showed the site poses no immediate danger to the public, but presents possible long-term risk.