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3A

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Public gets up close to CWM

Open house brings large turnout

BY AARON BESECKER
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PORTER — Warren Hastings of Porter brought his wife and two children to Friday's open house at Chemical Waste Management. They took the bus tour of the facility, walked through the plant's laboratory and learned a lot about what actually goes on at the waste treatment facility.

"It's very impressive," Hastings said, of the facility's operation.

Members of the public had a chance to ask questions of both local and national radiation experts as well as CWM staff.

About 750 people attended the open house. That was more than anticipated, according to Richard Sturges, CWM district manager, who was expecting around 450 visitors.

"We had an overwhelming response," said Sturges. "This is very exciting for us."

About two-and-a-half miles down the road, in the lush green grass of the St. John's Lutheran Church Cemetery, some upset residents joined local politicians to urge for action by the governor.

"We beg Gov. Pataki to take immediate action to do something that the (Department of



DAN CAPPELLAZZO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

LESSON: Jamie Prouse, a health physicist from Shaw Environmental, shows the crowd how much radiation exists in a dinner plate during the CWM open house Friday. Radiation experts were on hand to inform the public about safety and radiation issues at CWM.

Environmental Conservation) has not done," said Vincent Agnello, president of Residents for Responsible Government, a local group of concerned residents.

Due to what Agnello called unsafe conditions at the site, RRG urged Pataki to issue an executive order to shut down CWM. A recent report issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said plutonium and other radioactive material had been found on CWM property.

The state Department of Health recently refused to allow CWM to begin new excavation projects on their property until more tests were done.

RRG members also questioned CWM's desire to bring the public onto their site, calling it a health hazard.

"It's not a very well thought out idea," state Sen. George Maziarz, R-North Tonawanda,

who also agreed that urgent action is needed.

State Assemblywoman Francine DelMonte, D-Lewiston, said what RRG wants essentially replicates the intent of legislation she proposed that passed in the state Assembly earlier this year. Her legislation

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was written to clarify the intent of a 1987 law that was supposed to ensure Porter gets the help it deserves in managing hazardous waste.

"I remain concerned about the on-going human health and environmental impacts of hazardous waste in our community," DelMonte said.

Town of Lewiston Supervisor Fred Newlin announced his plans to bring the issue of potential health risks surrounding CWM to the attention of both Sens. Charles Schumer and Hillary Clinton when he makes a trip to Washington, D.C., next week.

Former CWM general manager George Spira invited anyone who questions the public's safety due to CWM operations to come and tour the site for themselves.

"There's absolutely nothing for them to be concerned about," said Spira, who worked at CWM for 30 years and still does consulting for the company.

Michael Ryan, a radiation safety expert who also works as a consultant for CWM, gave presentations to the public during the open house. Ryan said the average person comes in contact with more radiation every day than they would be exposed to at CWM.

"You're in a radiation world," Ryan said.

For the Hastings family, coming to the event didn't put anyone into an unhealthy situation, according to Warren Hastings.

"I don't think their safety was jeopardized," he said.

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