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Corps rebuts inaccuracies in daily newspaper's NFSS report

by Terry Duffy

Controversies surrounding news on the Lake Ontario Ordnance Works site continue.

The latest comes from apparent inaccuracies contained in a Sunday, July 19, Buffalo News report on the topic of radioactive leakage at the Niagara Falls Storage Site complex. The report raised questions involving the potential leakage of uranium into groundwater in areas adjacent to the Interim Waste Containment Structure on the western side of the 191-acre NFSS.

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Session details found in 87-page Corps PDF link

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As covered in great detail in past Sentinel issues, the IWCS has been and remains a major concern for the community and also the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, government overseers of NFSS facility and much of the former LOOW site operations. IWCS was the topic of a lengthy June 24 Corps session (July 3, Sentinel) where a large contingent of Corps reps from the Buffalo District discussed future plans for the containment cell.

Problem was, despite the significant news on the IWCS status, the potential for radiation leakage and future plans that came from that session, it was also one of the poorest

attended in recent memory. While it did include members of the area's currently independent LOOW Restoration Advisory Board, the session saw no political representation whatsoever, very limited attendance by area residents, and no media attendance other than the Sentinel.

So inaccuracies over what was actually discussed that evening would tend to follow.

This past week, in its "Beyond the Headlines ... The Corps Story," found on the Corps Web site address www.lrb.usace.army.mil/derpfuds/loow-nfss/headlines-2009-07-20.htm the Corps reviewed the News report and rebutted the inaccuracies with its own accounts from the session, some

of which were reported in the Sentinel back on July 3, and others found in much greater detail in its own 87-page PDF link from the June 24 session.

In a nutshell, the Corps restated its understandings of the IWCS contaminations that were outlined June 24, from its earlier Remedial Investigation Report, and discussed questions posed in the News article over sampling procedures. It then reiterated its stance that the IWCS in its current state was considered safe.

Regarding questions over sampling for radioactive contaminants, which would involve actually disturbing the integrity of the IWCS as it exists, the Corps stressed at this time it was not

in favor of doing it. "The value of the information to be gained from these samples and measurements, at this stage of the project, was not worth the potential risks to the health and safety of our workforce and the public, and the potential increase in the mitigation of contaminants," the Corps stated. It added that should that option come to be from its planned evaluations of the IWCS, a remedy to be identified in a forthcoming "Record of Decision" from its pending work; "the Corps is open to collection of samples from the IWCS."

Regarding concerns raised over seepage of radioactive contaminants into the groundwater, issues outlined by the Sentinel and by the News, the

Corps responded, "The environmental surveillance that is routinely conducted at NFSS indicates there is no increase in uranium levels measured in the groundwater that would indicate that the IWCS is leaking."

Its response concluded "... Findings indicate the IWCS life, or time when the cell is predicted to begin leaking into the groundwater, to be 160 years. The Corps is committed to ensuring the protectiveness of the IWCS by means of maintenance and monitoring until a final decision regarding the long-term remedy is selected."

For further information on the June 24 session, download the PDF link found on the Corps Web site.