

LOOW plant remediation to be subject of workshop

Event won't address efforts at adjacent site

BY RICHARD E. BALDWIN

NEWS NIAGARA REPORTER

LEWISTON — Chemical contamination dating to the early days of World War II in the Lewiston-Porter area will be discussed during a public workshop at 6 p.m. Wednesday in the Lewiston Senior Citizens Center, 4361 Lower River Road.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will describe its investigation into the nature and extent of contaminants left by the U.S. Department of Defense in the abandoned sewage treatment plant on a portion of the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works. Such plants now are called wastewater treatment facilities.

Arleen K. Kreusch, an outreach program specialist for the Corps of Engineers, stressed that the workshop will be limited to the treatment plant site and will not include the adjacent Niagara Falls Storage Site, nor its interim waste containment structure.

The Niagara Falls Storage Site and the old treatment plant are both on the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works property, but their cleanups are two separate and distinct projects, Kreusch said. She said the Niagara Falls Storage Site will be discussed at a separate workshop, yet to be scheduled.

"It probably is confusing to mix discussion of the two sites in the same breath, because they operate under two separate federal programs and have different geographical locations within the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works site," said Amy H. Witryol, a Lewiston resident who became a member of the sites' Restoration Advisory Board in 2003 and has closely followed environmental cleanup efforts there.

Witryol added, however, that the Restoration Advisory Board has created a website to encourage public comment "on whether the Town of Lewiston should become home to a radioactive waste disposal facility."

Chairman William Choboy of the Restoration Advisory Board said, "We think the public needs to know that the Army Corps of Engineers is considering three options for the long-term management of radioactive wastes at the Niagara Falls Storage Site, located 1 mile east of Lewiston-Porter School property.

"Two of the options contemplate turning the Niagara Falls Storage Site into a permanent radioactive waste disposal facility."

The public can comment on the options at www.loowrab.com, the Advisory Board's website. The options being considered are:

- Removing the high-activity uranium residues and others, and creating an on-site disposal cell for remaining lower-activity waste.
- Removing everything from the interim waste containment structure and disposing of it at another site, probably in Idaho, Nevada, Texas or Utah, since there are no licensed facilities for such disposal in New York State.
- Enhancing the cap of soil, clay and grass that covers the structure and leaving everything in place.

Speakers at recent meetings of the Lewiston Town Board and the Lewiston Village Board have endorsed the Advisory Board's efforts to get public comment on its website and to remove all of the

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TNT plant was decommissioned after nine months of production

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hazardous material from the original government property.

The Department of Defense obtained 7,500 acres near the Lewiston-Porter town line in Niagara County in 1941 and built the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works to manufacture trinitrotoluene, or TNT, during World War II. TNT production facilities were built on about 2,500 acres, and the remaining 5,000 acres were left undeveloped.

The army manufactured TNT for about nine months at a facility that included a power plant, hospital, fire department, water supply system and waste treatment system.

The TNT plant was decommissioned in 1943, and the 5,000 acres of undeveloped land was declared excess and transferred to the General Services Administration for disposition to private landowners.

Present owners include the Lewiston-Porter School District, local and federal governments, individual homeowners

and private corporations such as Chemical Waste Management Co. and Modern Disposal Services.

The Buffalo District of the Army Corps of Engineers is investigating the site under the Defense Environmental Restoration Program for Formerly Used Defense Sites.

The program focuses on chemical contamination by the Department of Defense and is the basis for discussion at Wednesday's public workshop.

In a separate project, about 1,500 acres in the southern portion of the ordnance works production area were transferred to the Manhattan Engineering District, which later became the Atomic Energy Commission and then the Department of Energy. The Manhattan Engineering District worked on development of the atomic bomb.

The Department of Energy still owns 191 acres of that property, now known as the Niagara Falls Storage Site.

Until 1952, radioactive waste and residue were taken there for storage.

The corps is investigating the site under the Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program, which addresses radiological contamination from the nation's early atomic energy program and will not be part of Wednesday's discussion.

Confusion between the environmental cleanup program at the former sewage treatment plant and the one at the Niagara Falls Storage Site is worsened by acronyms widely used by participants in the programs and by those who closely follow them.

For example, one printed page of explanatory material uses the "words" AEC, DOD, DOE, FUDS, FUSRAP, LOOW, MED, NFSS and TNT.

Other "words" include ARAR, CERCLA, CFR, FS, IWCS, K-65, NCP, OU, R-10, RAB and ROD. Definitions are given for some, but not for all.

More information about Corps of Engineers investigations is available at www.lrb.usace.army.mil.