Army Corps informs on uranium testing at NFSS

by Terry Duffy

Members of the Army Corps of Engineers, Buffalo District, provided new details on monitoring efforts at the Niagara Falls Storage Site, during an informational meeting Tuesday of the Lake Ontario Ordnance Works Community Action Council at Lewiston-Porter.

Jane Stanton, project engineer, Niagara Falls Storage Site for the Army Corps, along with other Corps officials, discussed a number of initiatives the agency has undertaken over past months and is continuing on the NFSS property. They said the work was being done in response to queries and concerns raised earlier of uranium leakages in groundwater in areas adjacent to the 10-acre radioactive Interim Waste Containment Structure on the site. Included was news on the placement of new monitoring

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wells throughout the NFSS, and the excavation and sealing of pipelines in its central, northeast and south areas.

Stanton disclosed that the Corps installed 17 monitoring wells, designed to detect uranium, in areas where concerns had been raised. "We plan on doing additional work ... in the spring," said Stanton, adding the Corps' latest efforts weren't expected to have any impact on its separate feasibility study of the IWCS, now ongoing, to determine future work for the radioactive cell.

Stanton said the new monitoring wells were placed at locations that revealed uranium contamination in the groundwater in established wells on the NFSS property. Notable locations were two wells placed in a far northwest corner and one in a southeast corner of a uranium groundwater concentration found in the northwest of NFSS, adjacent to the former Town of Lewiston water treatment plant; three placed in an area in the central northeast of NFFS, where new and dissolved uranium groundwater contamination concentrations are found; and four placed in an area east of the IWCS cell and the central drainage ditch where concerns raised last year by a LOOW Restoration Advisory Board member, chemist Ann Roberts, who indicated problems of groundwater uranium contaminations, suspected to have come from the IWCS.

Stanton said the Corps placed four new monitoring wells, three at deeper levels and one shallower, in an area surrounding wells OW-11A and OW11B. Those are the wells that Roberts had voiced concerns about a possible eastern pathway of uranium contaminants coming from the adjacent IWCS cell on the west where high levels of K-65, L-30, R-10 and other radioactive wastes are buried. "The Corps will be reviewing this new data to determine what is next," said Stanton. She said the Corps has been testing and continues to analyze these wells for dissolved total uranium, chlorinated waste solvents from an earlier boron plant at NFSS and for "other elements" beyond those found in groundwater (uranium).

Stanton said other wells are being placed at NFSS to detect any movement from disturbed areas on the site and that more may be placed, dependent on the Corps findings of its samplings.

Stanton said that those results were not yet available and cited a number of reasons. Included were samplings done thus far, delays in shipping samples to a testing lab in St. Louis, the fact that NFSS and a number of Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Plan facilities utilize the same lab, and the delays with the return and review of data by the Corps. She said testing continues and full results wouldn't be expected until spring.

Other work currently under way by the Corps at NFSS involves the excavation, analysis and sealing of waterlines found throughout the facility. Stanton said the work includes a 10-inch line located on the southeast corner of the IWCS; a north-south series of three water lines of different sizes found to the east of IWCS, with actual excavation/testing work done on the top north area of the NFSS property; and an east-west series of three waterlines, again different sizes, found on the eastern side of NFSS with actual excavation/testing being done adjacent to the Modern landfill property.

"All these pipelines are legacy pipelines," commented Joe Gardella, John and Frances Larkin professor of chemistry at the University of Buffalo and CAC co-chair, in response to a question at the session on whether any of the waterlines in question were still active. "They're no longer used."

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Stanton said the procedure involves the excavation of trenches, two feet wide by 10 feet deep to expose the lines, actual cutting of the lines to analyze the water content, followed by capping and cementing of the pipes to permanently seal them off.

As to results, Stanton said they were encouraging thus far. For example, the line found southeast of the IWCS revealed no migration of contaminants in the pipeline. "There was a large volume of water found, but all pathways were clean" in the 10-inch water line, said Stanton.

"The fluctuation (of concentrations overall) has not been that great," she added.

Stanton said all pipelines throughout NFSS are going to be cut, capped and permanently sealed. "We've cut and capped all lines to the north; lines leading to CWM will be excavated along with a manhole in that area." She said the Corps expects all lines from the plant would be cut and capped at both ends by the spring.

"It seems the Army Corps has gone to great extremes to put to rest all the concerns" (from the community), commented Chris Roser, Lewiston-Porter superintendent of schools, who attended the CAC session.

"I'm encouraged they (the Corps) has been able to identify all pipelines of concern," added Gardella.

Wrapping up:

•CAC members and attendees heard about a new Corps initiative, an interactive website for LOOW, not yet live, that is expected to provide greatly expanded information to the public on the IWCS, NFSS and overall LOOW properties. Building on the earlier Community LOOW Project website created by the Niagara County Health Department and assorted local groups, plus recent information gleaned from CAC and the local RAB website, the new Corps endeavor is expected to contain extensive historical information on the LOOW, recent aerial photos, Internet mapping, Web-based queries of data, plus new groundwater analyses, site updates and more. Not yet complete, the site is anticipated to be live "in a matter of months," according to the Corps.

•The CAC reported it would pursue contacts with the offices of area federal elected officials in coming months in an effort to enlighten all on the status of the IWCS, the Corps feasibility study, the site's potential future and the expected need for enhanced, dedicated government funding to address any possible cleanup/remediation.

As part this, CAC members indicated the need to greater embrace the community into a much fuller understanding on the scope of a potential IWCS cleanup endeavor as the Corps' feasibility study is completed and a record of decision is issued. Included would be such considerations as the cleanup options, the trade-offs, values, priorities and costs of the potential actions and cleanups, along with the numerous risk issues. "Our goal is to let the community completely understand that," said Doug Sarno, Corps technical facilitator with the CAC for the IWCS project.

More news on this, in future Sentinel issues.