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Longstanding Nuclear Waste Site in Niagara County Now One Step Closer to Remediation

By Angela Christoforos

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LEWISTON, N.Y. -- Back in the 1940s, the Niagara Falls Storage Site in Lewiston was a facility that supplied materials for World War II. Through the development of the atomic bomb, nuclear waste material was left behind.

The facility became a storage area for that kind of material and more than 70 years later, that's still the case.

"This was an interim solution, that's why we call it the interim waste containment structure. The waste was placed there to be containerized to protect human health and the environment of the surrounding area until a final remedy could be put in place," said Army Corps of Engineers Special Projects Branch Chief John Busse.

Now the Army Corps of Engineers, which is responsible for the Former Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program, is one step closer to removing the nuclear waste with a proposed \$490 million plan.

"We're going to take out the residue material which are the high radioactive material that's in there, we're going to treat, containerize it and take it to a licensed disposal facility down in Texas," said Busse.

In a statement, a member of the Lake Ontario Ordnance Works Restoration Advisory board said that many families in the 1940s saw their land poisoned with dangerous radioactive waste, and for decades residents have refused to let the federal government make the storage permanent. The board looks to the Army Corps to control elevated uranium in groundwater around the containment cell and to prepare for full remediation as soon as possible.

Busse says it won't happen overnight, and in fact it could take over a decade to secure the needed funding.

A public forum regarding the proposal will take place at 6:30 p.m. Jan. 13 at the Senior Center in the Town of Lewiston.

"We finally reached a preferred alternative. We're finally moving in the right direction it may take some time to get to the end zone there to finalize it and put the remedy in place but there's finally and in sight," said Busse.

Until final remedial action is put into place, Busse says the Corps of Engineers will continue to operate and maintain the interim waste containment structure as usual.

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