

U.S. Army Corps discusses NFSS cleanup plan

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LEWISTON – Residents showed great support for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' proposed plan for the Niagara Falls Storage Site during a public meeting held Wednesday night.

Cheers and applause erupted from at least a couple dozen locals who gathered at the Town of Lewiston Senior Center where officials from the army corps discussed the agency's proposal for removing radioactive waste from the facility on Pletcher Road.

Representatives from the corps' Buffalo district came to speak with the public and answer any questions concerning the feasibility study and proposed plan. Their concerns ranged from financial responsibility for the project to safety concerns for the residents in the immediate vicinity.

Special Project Branch Chief John Busse said all project finances will continue to come from the federal government. There is a priority-based queue that each site enters into in order to obtain necessary funds once all records of decisions are finalized for that particular site.

Of the 20 national sites, Busse said there are about six that are currently actively addressing waste. Since these sites are already active, they will receive first priority, he said. There was \$100 million available for these Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program projects in 2015 and there will be \$104 million available this year.

The preferred option for the Interim Waste Containment Structure of NFSS, Alternative 4, is estimated to cost \$490.6 million or about \$70 million each year over seven years, as Stephen Bousquet, chief of the Environmental Health Section explained during the poster-viewing portion of the public meeting. A record of decision is expected to be completely filed by 2017, Busse said during a presentation.



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Hank Spector, a health physicist with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, center, gives Paul Jung, left and Nick Tomkins, right, a history lesson on the Manhattan Project during Wednesday's public meeting in Lewiston.

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The IWCS is one of three operable units identified for the site. This amount does not take into account the cost of the Balance of Plant or Groundwater units. These units will go through the same process (feasibility study, proposed plan, period of public comment) and to reach their own records of decision by 2020.

After the records of decision have been finalized and after the project is granted funds to begin, Busse estimated a two-to-four-year period to acquire contracts for the work and then an additional year to finalize works plans before any physical work can begin. With the IWCS estimated at seven to eight years and unknown estimations for the other two operable units, the NFSS project will not see completion until 2030 at the very earliest just based on those numbers.

Lt. Col. Karl Jansen of the corps assured the public that the “first priority is the protection of human health and the environment.” Busse and Bousquet also echoed this. They each said there is not any current danger of radiation for the nearby residents and there will not be any when the work begins. The work will be done by remote excavators (operated by trained and professional technicians in a nearby but separate location) under a giant tent of sorts that will contain radiation. Bousquet said “all risk will be minimized to the lowest extent possible.”

The waste containing K-65 – which accounts for 1 percent of the volume of waste but 98 percent of the radiation – will be mixed with fly ash and concrete, Busse said, to be put into steel containers and sent away to an off-site facility. Doug Allen, a subject matter expert and consultant to the corps through Leidos, said that even if the trucks carrying this contained waste should have an accident, the containment would hold and the radiation would remain contained. He added that radiation would be undetectable 50 to 100 feet from the site during the excavation.

During the public comment portion of the meeting, Lewiston-Porter Central School District Superintendent Paul Casseri asked the corps to please keep in mind the school community next door. He specifically mentioned extra consideration during the transportation of the hazardous materials. A few other residents commended the corps for its decision and the work that went into it.

“Regarding proposed option 4 - Hell yes,” said Lewiston resident Amy Witryol, a longtime advocate for cleaning up the Pletcher Road property.