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Army Corps session provides details on IWCS future

by jmaloni
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Editor-In-Chief

Representatives from the Army Corps Buffalo District provided the long-awaited details to area residents on the Corps preferred option to the Interim Waste Containment Structure at the Niagara Falls Storage Site.

At a presentation session held Wednesday in the Lewiston Senior Center, roughly three-dozen residents witnessed a historical video recalling 1980s construction of what was to become the 10-acre IWCS radioactive containment cell. They were then guided through the details of the radioactive contaminants buried inside, followed by Corps explanations on how it arrived at the proposed alternative.

"We've got many projects in our responsibility, but this hits close to home," Corps Cmdr. Karl D. Jansen said. "Many of our 300 employees in the Buffalo District live in this community. We care about all our citizens ... and safeguarding them."

In announcing the Corps preferred Alternative No. 4 - a $490.6 million plan that calls for complete excavation and treatment and removal of the IWCS radioactive contents - Jansen said, "Our No. 1 priority is protection of human health and the environment. This guides our decision-making process.

"Our preferred alternative that we're proposing tonight is known as Alternative No. 4. It involves excavation, partial treatment, and out-of-state disposal of the entire contents of the IWCS." "This proposal is the result of complex and meticulous analysis. In our judgment, this alternative provides the best protection for human health and the environment," Jansen said.

As revealed in a detailed Sentinel report (Dec. 12, 2015), this process, when completed, will involve the removal of three subunit cells in the IWCS that contain varying amounts of radioactivity dating back to World War II activity and post-WWII landfilling at NFSS.

•Subunit A, containing 28,440 cubic yards of wastes, is where the highest percentage of radioactivity - 98 percent - is found. This includes K-65, L-30, L-50 and F-32 residues - wastes placed within the confines and basements of former buildings 411, 413 and 414 at NFSS (now demolished). Also found in the subunit are assorted contaminated materials, including soils and building rubble and debris from the demolished structures on the NFSS. Subunit A is found in the central and south-southwest portions of the IWCS cell.

•Subunits B and C, found in the middle and northern sections of the IWCS, contain assorted rubble and debris associated with K-65 waste handling, demolished building structures, contaminated ore-processing R-10 residual materials, and lower-volume contaminated soils. The estimated total volume of both units is 249,632 cubic yards,

yet the actual percentage of radioactivity is just 2 percent.

John Busse, Corps Buffalo special projects chief, discussed the three other remedial alternatives the Corps had been considering:

- No. 1 - No action.
- No. 2 - Excavation, treatment and monitoring and off-site disposal of subunit A, with enhanced containment of subunits B and C with land use controls and monitoring;
- No. 3 - Two options: excavation, treatment and monitoring and off-site disposal of subunit A, with enhanced containment of subunits B and C with land-use controls and monitoring; or, excavation, treatment and monitoring and off-site disposal of subunits A and B, and enhanced containment of subunit C with enhanced land-use controls and monitoring;
- No. 4 - Complete excavation, treatment and monitoring and off-site disposal of subunit A, and excavation and off-site disposal of subunits B and C.

Busse said the Corps viewed alternatives 2 and 3 as the lesser options, as both provided for a limited removal and required continued Corps operations and maintenance of the IWCS for the next 1,000 years. "Through our comprehensive evaluation, what we determined was the best alternative was taking it all away" as provided in Alternative No. 4, Busse said. "Removing all our future land use controls, all operations and maintenance, and returning the site back to its original condition."

"We put (these options) through a comparative analysis," Busse continued, explaining the Corps breakdown in ultimate cost for each of the plans. He said that, while alternatives 2 and 3 were lower in cost - $67.4 million for No. 2 and $303.6 and $362.4 million, respectively, for No. 3 versus $490.6 million in No. 4 - this option eliminates long-term Corps oversight. Busse said the Alternative No. 4 removal method was successfully utilized by the Corps when it performed a similar radioactive landfill cleanup back in the 1990s at Fernald, Ohio.

Busse said the Corps, as part of its remedial action process for the NFSS, anticipates having a record of decision for IWCS in 2017. The Corps is also pursuing decisions on other NFSS areas of remediation, that being the NFSS balance of plant and ground water operation, which are scheduled for feasibility study work in 2018, a proposed plan in 2019, and record of decision in 2020.

From there, any future work and remediation at NFSS would be subject to dedicated government funding - namely a congressional appropriation, as the $490.6 million cost for remediating the IWCS goes far beyond Corps, Department of Defense and Department of Energy available remedial funding resources, Jansen said.

Members of the Lake Ontario Ordnance Works Community Action Council, a local group that has been working with Corps facilitator Doug Sarno on the IWCS remediation project, is now pursuing networking contacts with a number of area congressional representatives and U.S. Senate members as funding searches continue.

Busse forecasted a timeframe of 2022 to 2032 as a "best case scenario" for actually completing the IWCS remediation once funding is secured.