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Niagara Falls Storage Site report released

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JAMES NEISS

Kevin Myers of Lewiston looks over a graphic on the Niagara Falls Storage Site during a January public

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LEWISTON — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has released the 2014 Niagara Falls Storage Site Environmental Surveillance Technical Memorandum.

The recently published 300-page document of mostly charts, graphs and tables shows that "the findings are consistent with the findings of prior year evaluations, demonstrating that site controls are continuing to perform as designed and the site is fully protective of human health and the environment."

Corps Chief of Public Affairs Andrew Kornacki, Special Project Branch Chief John Busse, Hydrogeologist Bill Frederick and Project Engineer for NFSS Jane Staten explained the newly released report to the Gazette.

Frederick reported that much of the groundwater in the area is "right around the drinking water standard" for New York. Some uranium has been found in the groundwater "right around" existing wells within the site, but "it's not concerning," he said.

The corps has found increasing trends in two of the site's wells, which is attributed to "residual soil contamination from former operations in this area," according to the report. According to Busse, the contaminants in the groundwater are only expected to travel 6 inches over a period of 10 years.

Overall, the corps reports that there is no cause for alarm and nothing

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much has changed since the last report of this kind.

Some residents maintain that there may be an issue with the maintenance of NFSS. Lake Ontario Ordnance Works Restoration Advisory Board has been arguing for additional monitoring of area groundwater for years, but the corps maintains that it has what it needs.

"Historical data identified by RAB members indicates that infiltration (of rainwater and snowmelt), and therefore, leakage has likely occurred. The Corps disagrees," according to the RAB website. "Gaps in historical surveillance impedes the identification of contamination from leakage, as opposed to residual groundwater contamination missed in prior clean-up attempts."

RAB member since 2003 and Lewiston resident Amy Witryol gave her individual opinion on the matter, saying the corps "has not provided any soil sample data to substantiate its claim" that the NFSS Interim Waste Containment Structure is not leaking. She calls for additional monitoring of the site and more data to be released to both the RAB and the public.

"To the contrary," Witryol said, "Corps data shows detections of uranium in certain groundwater wells south and east of the IWCS has increased from 5-10 micrograms/liter in the 1980s, to 3,000-4,000 micrograms/liter, today. The increase in the past several years has been particularly steep and stabilizes in some wells only when Corps construction reroutes contamination from one groundwater well toward another."

Witryol was also concerned that the report was not published until after the public comment period for the IWCS had ended on Feb. 6. Busse said this was not intentional; it went through long data collection, validation and internal review processes, just as all reports must.

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