

## Niagara Falls Storage Site Community Meeting

December 10, 1997

### Tough Questions

Proposed frameworks/answers are in italics.

Why isn't there a full-time presence on site any more? How do we know that it's safe?

*The site is monitored and inspected regularly, and the data show no problems with either the waste containment structure or the site. Staffing will be re-evaluated if current conditions change.*

DOE used to hold meetings in one of the buildings that is now slated for decontamination. Did they know that and, if so, why would they endanger our health?

*Public access to the offices at the site was largely to Building 403, where the contamination was in spotty locations and restricted from access.*

Is the Corps going to follow the recommendations in the NAS report? Why would the Corps think it knows better than the National Academy of Science?

*The Corps is reviewing the recommendations made in the National Academy of Sciences report. The public will be involved in the decision-making process for the Niagara Falls Storage Site.*

Just how radioactive is the material in the waste containment structure -- and don't give me those obscure measurements that don't mean anything. Tell me whether I have to move or wear special clothing.

*No. Under the present conditions the material does not pose a threat to human health and the environment. Detailed information about the nature and extent of the radioactivity is contained in the National Academy of Sciences report.*

The St. Louis Site has the same kind of wastes as we do -- they send some of their K-65 wastes here -- and that site is being cleaned up now. Why isn't our site getting cleaned up, if we have the same kind of high-level waste?

*There is no immediate threat to public health and the environment under current conditions because of the waste containment structure. However, plans are being developed to address the Niagara Falls Storage Site wastes and the public will be involved in that process. [are we doing a RI/FS]*

What are you doing to keep kids from jumping the fence and sledding on the waste containment structure? What are you doing to keep hunters from taking deer from the site?

*The site is fenced and signs are posted.*

How do we know that the deer and other animals are not contaminated? I see them grazing on the waste containment structure all the time.

*The site is monitored and there is no indication that any contamination is escaping the waste containment structure.*

What kind of monitoring are you doing and how frequently?

*We monitor for radon gas concentrations at the perimeter of the site twice a year.*

*Another type of test -- known as radon flux monitoring -- is done once a year on the waste containment structure to measure any emissions. Groundwater monitoring is also conducted annually at the site.*

What do you do if your monitors show a problem? How quickly will you know the results, or will I be exposed while you wait for lab results?

*In addition to our monitoring program, we walk over the waste containment structure to check for physical integrity of the waste containment structure. There is no indication that there is a problem with containment at the site.*

What are you going to do to improve my property values? I can't sell my house with the site sitting there.

*As you know, there are many factors that affect property values. In the final Environmental Impact Statement for the Niagara Falls Storage Site, the impact on property values is discussed.*

How come we haven't heard from anyone about the site in nearly two years?

*The site has been in an operations and maintenance phase since the completion of the waste containment structure and the cleanup of the vicinity properties. We will involve all interested parties in decision making as we plan more work at the site.*

How come so much money is being spent at the Linde Site, where fewer people are exposed? Is it because of politics?

*Unlike the Niagara Falls Storage Site, the Linde Site is an operational facility. Indeed, work did not start at Linde until 1995 because the Niagara Falls Storage Site was of higher priority.*

The Failure Analysis Report for NFSS says that the waste containment structure will protect us, even if there is an earthquake. But the NAS didn't agree. Your contractor, Bechtel, did that report. Isn't that a case of the fox guarding the henhouse?

*This report was prepared at the request of the National Academy of Science because of Bechtel's familiarity with site conditions. The report was studied and evaluated by National Academy of Science experts who then published their own independent, unbiased report.*

What is the status of the Environmental Impact Statement for NFSS?

*The final Environmental Impact Statement was issued in 1986, before the U.S.*

*Department of Energy decided to follow the Superfund process. A copy is available for review in the FUSRAP Public Information Center.*

Why didn't DOE do a remedial investigation/feasibility study in the first place at the site?

*At the time, it was U.S. Department of Energy policy to conduct environmental cleanups under the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA. In 1994, the DOE changed its policy and decided to incorporate NEPA elements into Superfund cleanup documentation.*

Aren't you all just trying to outwait us, in hopes that we will die off or forget about the

site? Then you won't have to do anything?

*Absolutely not. We are developing cleanup plans for the site right now.*

What is the Corps track record for environmental cleanups like this one?

*In addition to a broad range of civil engineering projects, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had completed similar cleanups through its Formerly Utilized Defense Sites (FUDS) program, Department of Defense cleanups and other chemical and radioactive waste cleanups.*

Initial Brainstorming of some Questions in preparation for the community meeting to be held next week.

Niagara Falls Storage Site  
Community Meeting

Q1. Why isn't there a full-time presence on site any more? How do we know that it's safe?

The site is monitored and inspected regularly, and the data show no problems with either the waste containment structure or the site. Staffing will be reevaluated if current conditions change.

Q2. DOE used to hold meetings in one of the buildings that is now slated for decontamination. Did they know that and, if so, why would they endanger our health?

We can't speak for DOE. We trust they evaluated the facility and took the necessary precautions. We intend to evaluate the environment prior to holding a meeting there.

Q3. Is the Corps going to follow the recommendations in the NAS report? Why would the Corps think it knows better than the National Academy of Science?

The Corps is very carefully considering the NAS report. We also want to perform risk assessments to select the course of action that is safest for residents and workers. Risk assessments were not part of the NAS report, so these need to be added.

Q4. Just how radioactive is the material in the waste containment structure -- and don't give me those obscure measurements that don't mean anything. Tell me whether I have to move or wear special clothing.

You do not need to move or wear protective clothing. While the radioactive material inside the containment structure requires the protection provided by the containment structure, measurements of radioactivity outside the structure are at background levels (i.e., the same as if the waste were not there).

Q5. The St. Louis Site has the same kind of wastes as we do -- they sent some of their K-65 wastes here -- and that site is being cleaned up now. Why isn't our site getting cleaned up, if we have the same kind of high-level waste?

The waste at the NFSS is contained in an engineered structure. Because the waste is in a structure that protects local residents and wildlife, we have more time to consider the safest course of action.

More  
detailed  
response  
to  
high  
level  
question

and all previous documents  
must come to my  
conclusion

science  
evaluation  
done

Q6. What are you doing to keep kids from jumping the fence and sledding on the waste containment structure? What are you doing to keep hunters from taking deer from the site?

We are currently considering the best course of action and will keep you informed.

Q7. How do we know that the deer and other animals are not contaminated? I see them grazing on the waste containment structure all the time?

The interim cap was designed to prevent direct contact with the waste materials and reduce exposures to humans and wildlife.

Q8. What kind of monitoring are you doing and how frequently?

Water level measurements are taken quarterly in 60 wells; radon flux measurements are taken annually in 180 locations; 5 surface water and sediment locations are sampled annually for radioactive constituents; 8 groundwater wells are sampled annually for radioactive constituents; several metals and standard water quality parameters; radon TETLD exchanges are measured semiannually. Measurements were previously taken more frequently, but values have remained essentially unchanged over many years. For this reason, the current schedule is considered safe and adequate.

Q9. What do you do if your monitors show a problem? How quickly will you know the results, or will I be exposed while you wait for lab results?

If monitors show a problem, it would be because of a breach in the engineered containment structure (this would take a massive earthquake, which is not likely). In such an unlikely event, we will immediately notify the general public of the radiation hazard and will move immediately to seal the structure. Additionally, gamma particle emission is the actual hazard that would affect human health if this were to occur. These readings are taken directly on the site with a hand-held meter, and we do not have to wait for lab results.

Q10. What are you going to do to improve my property values? I can't sell my house with the site sitting there.

We will be identifying the cleanup method that is most protective of citizens and wildlife, and using that method. This may help local property values. Since there are two landfills in the same location, however, cleaning up the NFSS may not solve the property value problem.

Q11. How come we haven't heard from anyone about the site in nearly two years?