

Local officials and town residents vigorously opposed to DOE's waste burial plan Nuclear waste reaction: 'Get out of Town'

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If the U.S. Dept. of Energy (DOE) has its way, four sites in the Town of Tonawanda contaminated by nuclear waste will be partially excavated with onsite disposal.

If local government leaders and area residents have their way, some 8,000 tons of radioactive material will be put on the next one-way train out of town.

The battle lines were clearly drawn, even if troop population was sparse, at a public hearing Wednesday at Kenmore East Senior High School, 350 Fries Rd., Tonawanda.

Ronald E. Kirk of the DOE whose technical team has completed a five year investigation and feasibility study of the Town of Tonawanda site, said the hearing's purpose was to "involve the public in the decision making process."

DOE's proposed plan notes that, from 1942 to 1946, portions of Linde property and buildings were used for separation of uranium ores. Processing activities, conducted under a Manhattan Engineer District con-

tract, resulted in radioactive contamination of portions of the buildings and surrounding land.

When processing wastes from Linde were relocated and disposed of, three nearby Town properties were contaminated, according to DOE. They include Ashland 1 and Ashland 2 on River Road, and the adjacent Seaway Industrial Landfill.

DOE's plan to clean up the sites came under steady attack at Wednesday's 3-1/2 hour hearing.

Kirk said the four contaminated sites (the fourth is the Linde/Praxair facility on Sheridan Drive) pose "no imminent health hazards under current usage," but that future scenarios, if activities are not controlled, "could create a health hazard."

He said the DOE's recommendation of partial excavation and onsite disposal - at a cost of \$59 million - "ranks favorably against the alternatives," including the option of shipping all the waste out of town.

If the DOE prevails, Kirk explained, waste containment cells using clay, sand and topsoil would encapsulate the potentially harmful

material, restrict access to it, and prevent hazards. These structures would be monitored permanently, Kirk added.

But an onslaught of opposition from public officials and ordinary citizens raised a collective red flag in the face of the DOE plan.

Raymond E. Sinclair, a Town of Tonawanda councilman who read a statement on behalf of Sen. Mary Lou Rath, said, "We've done more than our share of dealing with the consequences of nuclear waste ... it must be removed from our developed, densely populated area ... remove this waste from the Town of Tonawanda."

The resultant applause typified reaction to the many others who took to the microphone and whose comments were recorded for the official record.

Richard M. Tobe, commissioner of the Erie County Dept. of Environment & Planning and chairman of the coalition Against Nuclear Materials in Tonawanda (CANIT), said he believed the DOE has not properly analyzed possible consequences

of waste containment cell structural failure - consequence such as those that occurred at Love Canal, he noted.

Tobe said acts of God - a plane crash or an earthquake, for example - could spell disaster. He said CANIT "is now satisfied there is a safe location for this material - Clive, Utah," adding that the DOE never disclosed availability of this licensed site.

Town of Tonawanda Supervisor Carl J. Calabrese, speaking on behalf of the Town Board, drew enthusiastic response after passionately delivering comments in disagreement with the DOE plan.

"The waste was generated by the federal government," he said. "The method used to dispose of it was incorrect. It's time for the Town of Tonawanda to be treated equally. The long term impact of this has not been fully addressed - especially with regard to the drinking water," he stressed.

Calabrese charged that "This was never a study at all. It was a process with a predetermined result. There's

no scientific, technical or engineering reason why this material can't be sent to the deserts of Utah."

Urging citizens to put pressure on their state representatives to fund DOE removal of the waste, Calabrese said "Get out of town, summarizes our position."

That position was echoed by Erie County Legislators Charles M. Swanick, and Leonard Lenihan of the 10th and 11th districts, John Mundie and George Mekrose of the Town Planning Board, Alexandra Cukan of the Western New York Sierra Club and many other officials and residents.

When George White, a town resident and general manager for former Ashland Oil (now United), said he was once told by a DOE contractor that "it doesn't matter what the public wants," Kirk pointed out that no final decision has been made, only a recommendation.

Swanick noted it may be necessary to hold another public hearing. "If information is not provided in a timely fashion, this might be a violation of the public hearing process,"

he said. "CANIT may request another hearing."

Kirk replied that a comprehensive public information campaign has been underway for some time. Response to the hearing will be presented in a special document in about five months, DOE said. After a 30-day public waiting period, remedial decisions will be documented in a "record of decision."

Melinda Kontos, a Ken-Ton music teacher and town resident whose mother recently died of cancer, said it was her understanding that radioactive slag from the Manhattan project was used as landfill for homes in the Green Acres area.

"My mother and eight contiguous neighbors have died of cancer," she noted. "Who will claim responsibility to do testing or treatment of these properties?"

Kirk responded that any slag found in the area Kontos pinpointed "has been found to be at levels above guidelines."