

METROPOLITAN NEWS

County urges atom bomb-waste removal

Tobe asks state to help fight U.S. plan to consolidate storage in Tonawanda

By MIKE VOGEL
News Staff Reporter

Erie County officials want the state to support efforts to get low-level radioactive atom bomb project wastes shipped from the Town of Tonawanda to a storage site away from the Niagara River.

In a letter sent Wednesday to Gov. Cuomo, County Environmental Commissioner Richard M. Tobe urged him to support a local coalition's opposition to federal plans that call for consolidating the wastes into one facility in the town.

"The material should be removed from Tonawanda and shipped elsewhere," Tobe said.

The U.S. Department of Energy is considering plans for the low-level radioactive waste, a legacy of the World War II years when uranium was processed here for Manhattan Project re-

search in other parts of the country.

Four Town of Tonawanda sites now contain some of the radioactive wastes, and a five-year Energy Department technical study recently recommended combining the materials into one low-level radioactive waste storage facility in the town.

But a public comment period — extended at county request until mid-February — also will consider the state's opinion and "community acceptance" of the recommendation, before the plan is approved or disapproved.

Erie County has been a strong supporter of local community opposition to both the storage plan and discussions in recent years of shipping nuclear materials from Colonie, near Albany, to Tonawanda for permanent storage.

"We have asked New York State, when they make their comments, to take the same position we have," Tobe said.

State Environmental Commissioner Thomas C. Jorling sent Tobe a letter this week promising that the Department of Environmental Conservation will submit comments, on behalf of the state, in time to meet the deadline, Tobe said.

"But they did not indicate what their comments will be," he added.

Aides to the governor could not be reached immediately to comment.

Opposition to the storage plan is being led by CANIT the Coalition Against Nuclear Materials in Tonawanda. The coalition includes federal, state, county, city and town lawmakers from this area.

Area residents will be able to voice their opinions on federal plans for the four radioactively contaminated sites in Tonawanda during a public meeting to be held at 7 p.m. Wednesday in the Herbert Hoover Middle School, 249 Thorncliff Rd.

The meeting is sponsored by CANIT and will include a briefing for resi-

dents on six options developed for the site. Both written and oral statements for inclusion in the Energy Department review of the remediation plans.

In his letter to the governor and other state officials, Tobe said coalition members oppose the federal plans for a variety of health, environmental and economic reasons.

"It would be ludicrous to even suggest that radioactive wastes be stored so close to the Niagara River, an irreplaceable source of municipal drinking water serving a population of more than 600,000 people," he said.

An estimated 8,000 tons of contaminated wastes are now at the Seaway Industrial Landfill, two old Ashland Refinery properties and the former Linde Air Products Corp. plant in Tonawanda. Consolidation into one of the Ashland sites would cost about \$59 million, and shipment to an existing storage site in Utah would cost \$201 million.