

CANIT, State reinforce opposition to DOE's local waste storage plan

by PATRICK KEYES

The message from residents of the Town of Tonawanda to the U.S. Department of Energy is a familiar refrain: get out of town. (See editorial on page four)

The message was echoed by a small but enthusiastic crowd at a public hearing Wednesday sponsored by the Coalition Against Nuclear Materials in Tonawanda. The meeting was held to add to the already growing public comment against the DOE's plan to store radioactive waste from four Tonawanda sites in one newly constructed cell near the Niagara River.

While the DOE has said it will weigh all comments equally, one comment that came in that day certainly will carry a lot of weight. Thomas C. Jorling, head of the state's Department of Environmental Conservation, gave the state's position on the matter by saying they want to see the waste removed and sent to an out-of-state site.

"That's just great news and it couldn't have come at a better time," said Richard Tobe, head of

Erie County's Department of Environment and Planning and chairman of CANIT. "This group's position is to hopefully alter the decision of the DOE and so far we've felt there has not been enough chance to offer comment from our perspective."

Tobe cited several reasons for last week's meeting following a public hearing set by the DOE on Dec. 1 of last year. He mentioned that there wasn't adequate time for review of the proposal to store waste from four radioactive waste sites in the town into one newly constructed clay-capped cell on what is known as the Ashland I site, adjacent to the Niagara River.

"There also wasn't enough time for people to speak at the meeting," Tobe added, explaining that CANIT's position had to be submitted in writing because it was too long to be read aloud. "We want to see all of the material excavated and we want to see it taken out of Tonawanda."

At this meeting, Tobe said a similar situation in the Chicago area was resolved in favor of local

opponents to the DOE's plan to store the waste in a new cell there. That gives officials here hope for a change of heart by the federal officials.

The DOE's cost estimates for transporting the waste was questioned. Federal officials say it will cost more than \$200 million, while Erie County Legislator Charles Swanick, a CANIT member, said his discussions with Conrail officials cut that cost estimate by nearly \$13 million.

Tobe said the DOE's current plan calls for 2 percent of the total cleanup funding available to take care of 18 percent of the waste by volume from across the nation located here.

Several residents spoke out against the DOE proposal, with some people with technical expertise citing the volatile nature of the material in Tonawanda and the dangers of the federal plan.

The comment period on the proposal closes Feb. 10, with a final record of decision set for later this summer by the DOE's Washington directors.

State joins fight vs. DOE plan

by PATRICK KEYES

The head of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation has urged the U.S. Department of Energy to remove the radioactive waste from four sites in the Town of Tonawanda.

That official state position, announced by Thomas C. Jorling, head of the DEC, and Assemblyman Robin Schimlinger, a member of the Coalition Against Nuclear Materials in Tonawanda, could have a serious impact on the DOE's plans for the material.

While the DOE is recommending that the waste be partially excavated and stored in a newly constructed cell at what is known as the Ashland I site, one of the nine criteria for the final decision is state acceptance. When added to strong community opposition, another criterion, DOE may be forced to look at other options.

In his letter to Dr. Tara O'Toole, assistant secretary of the DOE, Jorling said the "radioactive waste materials from this remedial action should be disposed of in an out-of-state DOE or commercial disposal site, such as the Envirocare site in Clive, Utah."

Jorling said that change would be consistent with DEC's recently developed cleanup guidelines for state waste sites which calls for unrestricted use of all formerly contaminated properties.

Schimlinger called the federal response to the situation "long overdue" but noted that he could not accept the current DOE plan.

"I am very pleased that New York State is standing up for Western New York's interests and opposing DOE's proposal," Schimlinger added.



Bee Editorial

DOE should move waste out of town

Several weeks ago in this space, we gave the opinion that the U.S. Department of Energy was acting in what it felt was the best interests of the people of the Town of Tonawanda in its long range planning system for the radioactive waste left in the town after Linde's involvement in the Manhattan District Engineering project of the 1940s. At that time, we said that unless its decision showed otherwise, the DOE had to be listened to due to its expertise in the subject area.

Almost immediately after the decision was announced, that opinion changed. In this week of losing football analogies, it's safe to say that while the DOE may have picked up its own fumble, it is clearly running the wrong way.

There are more than 350,000 cubic yards of contaminated waste in the town at four sites. The DOE wants to put as much of that as is

easily accessible into one new containment cell on what it calls the Ashland I property, a small parcel adjacent to the BFI landfill off River Road. That would put waste of a truly unknown danger quotient (despite what scientists might believe, there's no absolute quality to anything that volatile) within a couple hundred yards of one of the great fresh water resources in North America.

To say that is ridiculous is understating things. The DOE seems ready to stick by its guns, citing cost figures, the dangers of moving such material a great distance and other factors. Federal engineers and scientists claim the protection of the storage cell they propose would be more than adequate to meet any standards. However, that is in a perfect world. As was mentioned at last week's public hearing, the cell itself would become contaminated, thereby

making the site more dangerous; the fact that we live in a unstable seismological area makes such a prospect even more unsafe.

Perhaps the greatest concern over all of this is not the immediate health concerns but the effect of such a storage facility on the plans for the waterfront and how any potential danger so close to the scene would affect those plans. A major portion of this area's economic future lies in the possibilities for the waterfront. Putting radioactive waste in close proximity to land that is projected for major residential and commercial development is a major mistake.

In short, what seemed like a prudent course of following the DOE's lead turned out to be a white-knuckle trip. The waste in Tonawanda does not belong here where there are remote desert areas licensed to handle such material. Spend the money that is available and get the material out of here. We shouldn't have to pay for past government mistakes.