

TOWN OF TONAWANDA

U.S. will unveil nuclear-waste transfer plan

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Radioactive Manhattan Project waste now in two Town of Tonawanda landfills will be dug up and transported to an out-of-state disposal facility under a cleanup plan to be unveiled next month by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The recommendations follow congressional transfer of cleanup responsibility for the World War II atomic bomb project from the Department of Energy to Corps of Engineers offices.

Details of the proposal for the Ashland 1 and Ashland 2 waste sites near the Niagara River will be unveiled during a public meeting at 7 p.m. Dec. 17 in the Philip Sheridan Building, 3200 Elmwood Ave., Town of Tonawanda.

Out-of-state disposal of the wastes has been a long-term goal of governmental coalitions here, and environmental groups have pushed for stringent cleanup standards. Concerns also have been voiced, however, over the possibility of accidents during truck or rail transport of the waste soil.

Corps officials said the excavations will involve contaminated materials that exceed a guideline maximum for the Thorium-230 iso-

tope of 40 picocuries per gram.

Much of the waste material in the Tonawanda sites is soil contaminated by contact with radioactive elements from the refining of ores during efforts to produce bomb-grade uranium during the wartime project and the nation's early atomic energy programs. The waste also contains radium, which releases radon gas — identified as the second-leading cause of lung cancers, ranking behind smoking.

After 23 years of study and proposals by the Department of Energy, control of the federal Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program recently was transferred to the corps by Congress.

Ashland 1 and 2 are among five properties collectively known as the Tonawanda Site. The others are Seaway Industrial Park, also along River Road near the South Grand Island Bridge; the Linde/Praxair site on Sheridan Drive near Sheridan Park; and the Town of Tonawanda Landfill on East Park Drive.

The Energy Department previously launched a \$14 million project to remove some of the 8,000 tons of nuclear waste stored since the 1940s at the former Linde industrial site, and some structures have been razed. Demolition debris was trucked to a regional

landfill.

The bulk of the radioactive waste at Linde also would be removed for out-of-state disposal if the department plan continues. That decision partially reversed a 1993 department decision that the waste should be treated and stored in a cell along the Niagara River as the cheapest alternative.

Two major coalitions have been monitoring the cleanup proposals.

CANIT, the Coalition Against Nuclear Material in Tonawanda, is a local governmental coalition that has been working with planners to push for off-site disposal. Working independently, and insisting on greater public input to the efforts, are environmental activists from the Sierra Club Niagara Group, Buffalo Greens, FACTS (For a Clean Tonawanda Site), Local 8-215 of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union and the Western New York Council on Occupational Health and Safety.

The Dec. 17 meeting will include opportunities for public comment. Written comments will be accepted if postmarked by Jan. 8 and sent to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, FUSRAP Public Information Center, 70 Pearce Ave., City of Tonawanda 14150.