

Corps gives update on radiation cleanup

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TONAWANDA NEWS

TOWN OF TONAWANDA — Representatives of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers told Town officials Tuesday that a cleanup of radioactive materials at the Ashland 1 site is nearly complete.

Speaking to a joint meeting of the town's Planning Board and Environment Commission, Corps civilian engineer James Karsten said the remediation that began in June 1999 will come to an end this month.

"I'm happy to say they're about there," Karsten said. "They're scraping off the last bits of material at the Ashland 1 site."

In the early days of the nation's atomic energy program, the former Linde Air Products Division of Union Carbide processed uranium ores at its facility in Tonawanda.

From 1944 to 1946, about 8,000 tons of low-grade uranium processing wastes from Linde were deposited at the 10-acre site off River Road north of the I-90. Ashland Oil acquired the site in 1960 for its refinery operations.

Ashland built two storage tanks at the site in 1974 and moved soil containing low-level radioactive residues to a nearby site now identified as Ashland 2.

Karsten said remediation of the Ashland 2 site was completed in September.

At an adjacent third site, the Seaway Industrial Park, the Corps completed investigations in September and is working on a plan for future activities.

The Seaway site is a former landfill that Browning Ferris Industries operated from 1930 to 1995. About 6,000 cubic yards of low-level radioactive waste was disposed of at Seaway in 1974.

The Corps earlier had recommended capping the site and leaving the materials there.

But New York state disagreed with that plan and asked the Corps to look into removing the materials.

While probing deep into the landfill over the summer, the Corps found more contaminated soil than previously estimated.

But Project Manager Tim Byrnes said the material is buried by 30 feet of fill.

"It does not pose an immediate health hazard right now," Byrnes said.

The schedule of future activity at the site is dependent on funding, Byrnes said.

At the Linde site itself, progress on the cleanup has slowed as government funding has decreased. Remediation of the soil at Linde began in 2000 and is scheduled to be completed in 2004, Karsten

said.

A study of Building 14 at Linde was completed in February, and a plan for cleanup at that site is expected next month, Karsten said.

A schedule for studying the groundwater at Linde also is expected next month.

Karsten said field work at a fifth site, the Tonawanda Landfill/Mudflats area, was completed in September and a report on the findings is due soon.

Town Board member Raymond Sinclair praised the work the Corps has done since taking over the project from the Department of Energy.

"Since the Corps has taken over, we have seen more progress than boondoggling," Sinclair said.