

# Tonawanda residents, U.S. aides debate next steps in cleaning up radioactive sites

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The Tonawanda community and the U.S. Department of Energy are struggling to take the next step in the long path to cleaning up several radioactive sites in the town.

At a meeting Tuesday night, about 40 members of the public rejected efforts by the Energy Department to start a new decision-making procedure, including establishing a group of community representatives to talk about the clean up plan.

At issue is the clean up of about 8,000 tons of low-level radioactive waste dating to World War II and located along River Road and at the Praxair facility.

Last February, the Tonawanda community soundly rejected a \$58 million Energy Department proposal to excavate all the waste and store it in a permanent facility on River Road.

Repeatedly, the community asked for all the waste to be removed to a facility in Utah, which the DOE rejected because of its \$201 million price tag.

In April, at the urging of Rep. John

J. LaFalce, D-Town of Tonawanda, high-level Energy Department officials called a cease fire. They agreed to stop the official procedures and start over with a whole new plan.

The meeting Tuesday, held at Holmes Elementary School, was supposed to be the first step in that "new plan," but it remains unclear what the next step will be.

Many at the meeting remained skeptical that Energy Department officials really want public input.

"I feel like we have said something you don't like and you want to talk to us until we change our mind," said town resident Mary Lou Frost.

"The bottom line is they want to keep the waste in the Town of Tonawanda," said Ralph Krieger, union representative for Praxair workers.

"This is not for show," said Ronald Kirk, DOE Tonawanda site manager. "We would like the community, homeowners and residents to discuss the issues directly with DOE."

County Legislator Charles M. Swanick, D-Kenmore, a member of the Coalition Against Nuclear Materials in Tonawanda, a group of local, state and

federal elected officials, was furious that DOE was seeking to work with another community group. Swanick said DOE had worked with CANiT for five years.

"It troubles me that you are saying you don't want to work with us now, now you want to work with a citizens group," he said.

Tonawanda resident Kathy Sullivan said while she felt CANiT had represented the community well, she was frustrated with the lack of public access to the group.

Swanick insisted that CANiT meetings are open to the public. County officials said that a few sensitive decision-making meetings last year were closed.

"Our meetings have always been open to the public," Swanick reiterated after the meeting, noting the exception was two sessions last October and November when CANiT was deciding to oppose storage of the waste in the town.

Kirk said the DOE would consider the public comments at Tuesday's meeting and then determine the next step to take.