

Initial Assessment Co- 1

Government inadequacies endanger Tonawanda N-site

On Dec. 12, in response to concerns voiced by the Buffalo Greens that piecemeal "interim" cleanup actions at its Tonawanda nuclear waste sites "will result in inadequate cleanups," the Buffalo Common Council adopted a resolution calling on Energy Secretary Hazel R. O'Leary to reinstate the required public review process.

Two years ago the Department of Energy "suspended" the environmental impact statement public-review process for the Tonawanda site before issuing the required sitewide cleanup decision.

According to federal laws, before "final remediation" cleanup work can commence, the public environmental review process must be completed. A detailed sitewide cleanup decision must be recorded, which sets a cleanup priority (sequence of properties) and cleanup schedule for each property, specifies cleanup levels (the thoroughness of the cleanup), and selects the long-term waste management method and storage location.

Instead, at the urging of Rep. John

"The DOE has started an inadequate partial cleanup at the Linde/Praxair property."

LaFalce and with the approval of a group of politicians known as CANiT, the DOE has started an inadequate partial cleanup at the Linde/Praxair property under the guise of an "interim" action, without the proper public review and approval. This is the same approach that LaFalce imprudently recommended over 10 years ago at a radioactive-waste site located near Lewiston.

In the mid-'80s, over carefully reasoned objections by area residents (including myself), by the state Department of Environmental Conservation and by the Environmental Protection Agency, DOE delayed the required environmental impact statement process and instead, with the encouragement

of LaFalce, proceeded with an "interim" cleanup action and constructed the "interim" radioactive-waste landfill that is there today.

Recently, the prestigious National Research Council issued a report calling for the removal of most of the radioactive waste placed in that landfill, citing unacceptable "long-term risk to the public, given the existing environmental conditions and future unpredictability" of the site.

It is clear that 10 years ago the Energy Department did not appreciate the purposes of the environmental review process, a framework necessary to ensure the selection of a scientifically valid, environmentally sound and publicly acceptable policy. Unfortunately, this mentality continues today at Tonawanda and other nuclear-waste sites. DOE managers have yet to demonstrate the same proficiency at sound, long-term, radioactive-waste management they have previously displayed in producing nuclear weapons.

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