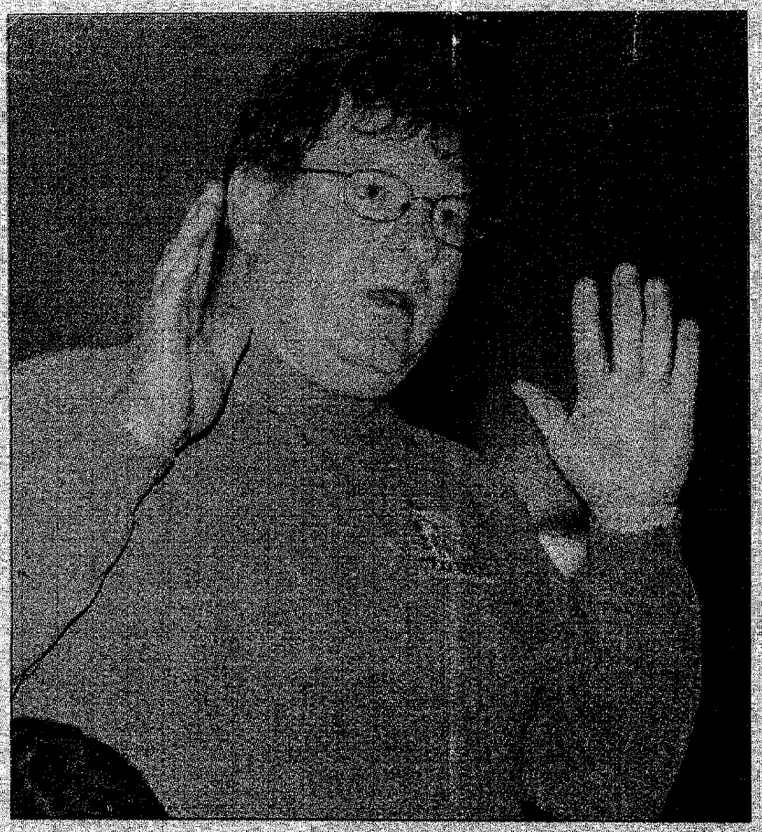
LANDFILL MEETING LEAVES RESIDENTS

SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS



PHOTOS BY **DAN CAPPELLAZZO**/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

UPSET: John Plyler of Hackett Drive in the City of Tonawanda asks Steve Buechi of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers if testing for radioactivity was done on the residential side of the fence adjacent to the Town of Tonawanda landfill.

Officials defend themselves from onslaught of questions

BY DAN MINER
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Frustrated City of Tonawanda residents took their concerns out on the main players involved with the Town of Tonawanda landfill Thursday, accusing them of lying and not caring about the potential health issues of radioactive materials found in the landfill.

"We're (ticked) off," said David Moran, who lives on Hackett Drive, the street bordering the landfill in the city. "You're putting every person in our family at risk."

Roughly 175 people attended the tempestuous meeting at Tonawanda High School, which had been hailed by officials as a unique opportunity for city residents and elected officials to meet face-to-face with those players, which included members of the state Department of Conservation, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Town of Tonawanda.

The meeting had intended to be a calm discussion of issues swirling around the landfill, which range from levels of radioactivity left there from the nation's early atomic energy program and radioactive americium left after Town of Tonawanda company, EAD Metallurgical, disposed of the material in a way that it ended up in the landfill.

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A set of presentations was set up before a short break and opportunity for residents to ask questions in three-minute intervals.

But the presentations were interrupted frequently by members of the audience, who more often than not fired questions at the panel from their seats.

Members of the panel tried to explain their actions regarding the landfill.

Steve Buechi, project manager for the Army Corps at the landfill, recited now familiar positions of radioactivity that falls just beneath federal guide

SEE **LANDFILL** ON PAGE 2A

STREET TALK

QUESTION: *Overall, were you satisfied with the presentation at the landfill meeting?*

Dennis Tarasek
City of Tonawanda

"No. Since they closed the landfill in 1989, the city and town have done nothing. They didn't tell us about the radiation."

Eugene Parks
City of Tonawanda

"It's fine up to this point. I see a little pattern forming in that they're not willing to stop and evaluate the situation. I feel we have been left out of the process to this point."

Chris Thomas
City of Tonawanda

"They're completely wrong according to their own info. They're playing around with the words ... They should test everyone's land to see what's really going on."

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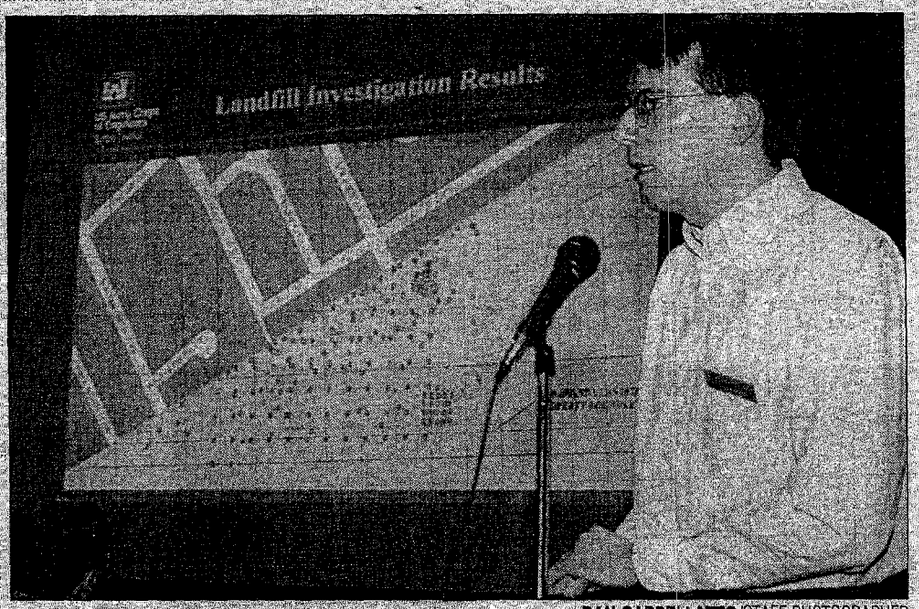
"I think it's all scripted. I've seen the same show. It's the same group that tells us the same information. I have two small kids, and you don't want them in harm's way. It gets very emotional."

— David McCormick of the City of Tonawanda



DAN CAPPELLAZZO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

EXPLAINING: Steve Buechi of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers speaks about testing at the Town of Tonawanda landfill Thursday during an informational hearing at the Tonawanda High School Auditorium.

LANDFILL ...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

lines for the health of those who use the landfill recreationally. He also said a record of decision in March 2007 would recommend whether or not the landfill be closed, and would be followed by a public comment period and public meeting for public input.

John Camilleri, the town's Wastewater and Treatment facility director, restated that the landfill has not accepted garbage since 1988, and that the town would like to make recreational use of the site after it's closed but will not make official plans until the Army Corps issues its decision.

Dennis Weiss of the DEC explained his agency's role in the closing and regulatory processes of the landfill, including the raised hills that have irked nearby residents who see it as a dire threat to their property values.

But members of the audience were clearly not convinced, and questions as to why the radioactive elements in the landfill not be removed like other sites in the Town of Tonawanda persisted throughout.

"Standards change," said Eugene Parks, a City of Tonawanda resident. "Twenty years from now they could be totally different and we could be pretty sorry we didn't clean this up before there was 40 feet of dirt on it."

At other times, the meeting's format broke down altogether, as residents concerned for their own safety voiced their distrust of the panel and insisted that garbage has continued to be dumped since the landfill's formal closure.

County Legislator Michele Iannello, D-Kenmore, who moderated the meeting, at one point threatened to adjourn the meeting if order was not preserved and reminded the audience that two City of Tonawanda policeman were present.

City of Tonawanda Mayor Ron Pilozzi spoke at the meeting, detailing months of phone calls and letters looking into the situation and appealing to the crowd that what is needed is information on whether the radiation lies on the property of nearby residents.

"What we really need here is data on your property," Pilozzi said. "Can we agree on that?"

He then read from a letter sent in January to U.S. Senators Charles Schumer and Hilary Clinton as well as U.S. Rep. Louise Slaughter asking them to authorize Army Corps testing on private properties.

"It is possible to assume that it is possible that some of the radioactive material may have migrated off the landfill into the yards of the contiguous homes," he said.

A representative from Slaughter's office was in attendance. Pilozzi said he has yet to receive a response to his letter.

Iannello was also moved to action, at one point asking Buechi point blank if removing the radioactivity was possible and formally requesting the public comment period after the Army Corps March decision be extended from 30 days to 90.

"We just want answers to questions and we don't want to hear a broken record," said city resident Bill Harmon. "If it was up to me, I'd say let's get the stuff out of there so I don't have to worry about my grandchildren."