

Initial report is good news for mudflats

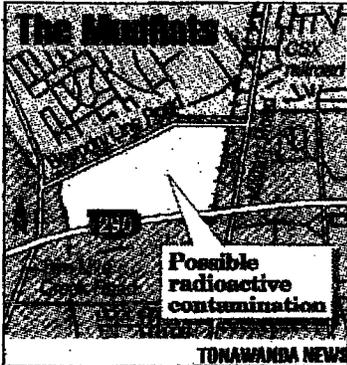
BY JIM CWERLEY
STAFF WRITER

A site believed to be contaminated with radioactive waste from the development of the atomic bomb is coming up clean, according to initial tests by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The Corps has been investigating the former Town of Tonawanda landfill site and the area commonly known as the mudflats for radioactive waste from the Linde project, officials said.

"We're not showing anything of significance. It's nothing that's harmful to (a person's) health or the environment," said Steve Bousquet, a field health physicist working on the project.

The site, bordered by the I-290 to the south, the CSX railroad to the east, the city of Tonawanda to the north and East Park Drive to the west, is said to contain uranium, radium and thorium from the development of the atomic bomb during World War II.



Diane Kozlowski, project manager for the Corps, cautioned that the results were only preliminary and officials are awaiting data from the laboratory before making a decision on the site.

"The lab data is really what we're waiting on."

A 1991 radiological survey turned up the contaminants, and a 1994 study defined the areas where the material was buried. The Corps announced plans to survey the 170-acre tract in early June, but a long stretch of hot weather forced work to creep along at a slower pace.

"You can't work people that long in the heat," Bousquet said. "The heat is the only thing holding us back."

The Corps is expected to finish preliminary testing and gather site samples in the mudflats by Tuesday, and is expected to begin testing in the adjacent Town landfill by July 23.

Kozlowski said the test results would be sent to laboratories in Colorado and South Carolina. Results would be sent back within two months, and a report on the findings would be released in late fall.

Laurence Rubin, commissioner of the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning and a member of the Coalition Against Nuclear Material in Tonawanda, said he has yet to see the results of the survey.

But he said he's always had a good relationship with the Corps on other projects.

Jim Rauch, an Amherst man who actively follows contamination at Tonawanda sites, said he wants to see actual survey results and readings before making a judgment.

He added, however, that he'd be happy to find less contamination at the site.

"The contamination certainly spread wide enough that to find any more would be a bad thing," he said.