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CITY OF TONAWANDA

Tests find no hazards at homes near landfill, DEC says

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Landfill leachate hasn't contaminated the sumps in a City of Tonawanda neighborhood, according to a report by the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

"The samples [were] analyzed for a suite of chemical and radiation parameters," Megan Gollwitzer, a spokeswoman for the DEC, said Wednesday. "Sampling results indicate that landfill contaminants are not entering the sumps of homes bordering the landfill."

Materials used in early nuclear weapons research were dumped in the Town of Tonawanda Landfill, which abuts a city neighborhood. The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers maintains they can safely remain in place as the landfill is closed and capped.

Nearby residents continuing to push for removal of the wastes and cleanup of the site got state and federal agencies to conduct further testing. Sump testing was done in March; homeowners received results last week.

"We have always said . . . that we wanted these tests to come back well for us, that we don't have to worry about our houses being contaminated. That's good news for us," said Joyce Hogenkamp of Clean Up Riverview's Environment.

Yet skepticism remains.

"When they say things fall within normal [ranges], you really wonder if they're telling the truth," Hogenkamp said.

The DEC tested 10 sumps, while the state Health Department tested basement air for volatile organic compounds. Levels of radium, thorium and uranium all fell within the range of normal background concentrations, according to the DEC report.

Chris Thomas, another organization member whose home was tested, worried about long-term exposure.

"There were elements that were elevated in certain areas, including my home," he said. "The concern that I still have is these elements are still 5 feet off my property and there's still no resolution to address these concerns."

The DEC's report concludes, in part: "The results do not indicate that there is a potential threat to

the health of the residents of the homes tested. All homes in the area are supplied by public water, and there are no known users of groundwater in the area; therefore, exposures to groundwater are not expected.”

The corps has agreed to additional tests to confirm levels of radiological contamination, but Thomas contends the money could be better spent.

“We already know what we’re dealing with,” Thomas said. “Let’s use those funds appropriately. Let’s re-mediate the site, and let’s move forward.”

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