

Environmental News

*A concise report of environmental news of special interest to those on the Niagara Frontier.
Including legislative developments and technical background reports on environmental topics.*

*A Few Megabytes Of Fresh Air
On The Niagara Frontier*
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Former Lockport Simonds Plant Workers Could Get Big Bucks From U.S.

There is a possibility that workers who claim radiation-related illness from time spent working on uranium milling at the former Simonds Saw & Steel Mill at Lockport could qualify for extra benefits as a result of an agreement between the Republican controlled U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. The national legislation could provide as much as \$1-billion over five years to uranium miners and weapons plant workers, sources told the *Lockport Home Page* Friday, 10/6.

About 15,000 persons nationwide appear to qualify for the program. Besides miners, workers in plants and transporters could qualify, sources say. In cases such as the Lockport situation, legal action would probably be necessary for the local workers to qualify and, as in all cases, a direct relationship between any illness and claims of radioactive material exposure would have to be verified.

Uranium miners already may qualify for federal payments capped at \$100,000. The legislation worked out Thursday would expand this compensation and open up the possibility of those who worked in defense related plants which handled uranium materials to be included. Before the legislation would take effect it would have to go through a number of administrative procedures and be approved by the President. Supporters hope that money might start becoming available in mid-2001. The basis for the payment scheme is contained in House of Representatives Resolution 4205. (10/6/00)

Army Corps Of Engineers promises "study." As previously reported here, the United States Army Corps of Engineers has taken over jurisdiction for portions of the former Simonds site believed contaminated with radioactive debris. Thursday, 10/5, a spokesperson for the Engineers will begin a "study" of the situation in Lockport. A report is expected early in 2001, the spokesperson said. (10/6/00)

No Significant Trace Of Radioactive Debris Off Simonds Site

...Field Survey For Lockport Page Turns Up Negative

Measurements made by Dr. Peter Buckholtz at various locations surrounding the former Simonds Saw & Steel Plant have turned up basically negative for any significant radioactivity that could be attributed as from the plant property. The measurements were made late in the week of September 4th and early in the week of September 11th.

Dr. Buckholtz said no samples were encountered that showed activity that justified sending away anything for a full lab analysis. Three different radiation detector instruments were used in the field perimeter survey starting along Ohio Street. All measurements were made on public properties. Only one area was found where sample readings were "above normal background." But these readings were so low that no conclusion of the presence of even small amounts of radioactive material was justified. The two radioactive metals reported used at the Simonds site, Uranium and Thorium, give off radioactivity in various combinations of alpha, beta, and gamma rays.

Buckholtz cautioned that the results of his brief survey don't guarantee that no radioactive debris has left the site. To make a more comprehensive survey, entry onto private property would be necessary, he said. (9/15)

Radioactivity at Lockport's Old Simonds Site Catches Media Coverage

Radioactive contamination at the former Simond Saw & Steel site in Lockport is catching outside media attention. Lockportians, of course, have known about the problem for decades. But a *USA Today* series of feature reports on the effect of the radioactivity in the former Simond workplace along with many other such examples has sparked Buffalo media interest. WGRZ-TV jumped on the bandwagon Wednesday, 9/6 with their own "investigative report." On Thursday, 9/7, the *Buffalo News* headlined a new story. "Revisiting a deadly atomic history." The *News* quotes Lockportian Ed Cook, now 84, recalling his days of working with radioactive uranium and thorium at the plant. The *Niagara Falls Gazette* then jumped on board the media feeding frenzy on with a headline declaring "Nuclear Horror Lingers." And lastly, on Friday, 9/8, the *Lockport Union-Sun & Journal* comes out with its stories based on the *USA Today* articles.

And where has been the *Lockport Home Page* in all this media activity. "Well," says Bob Rooney, Page Editor, "the story today is the media frenzy and we're putting up an account on our environmental page." As for the story itself, a factual report was published about two years ago here at the *Lockport Home Page* and a segment of that report still is online in our [Special Reports section](#). (9/7)

Army Engineers Plan To Take Responsibility For Cleanup

Update 9/8: The United States Army Corps of Engineers announced Friday, 9/8 in Washington that it expects to add the Lockport Simond Saw & Steel site (9.1-acres) to its clean-up list. The announcement came after a week of media attention of the long neglected Lockport environmental endowment. A spokesperson of the Army Corps could not even give an estimate of a date when the Engineers might begin actual cleanup.

Olin & US Sued For Contamination In At Lake Ontario Ordnance Works

Thursday, 8/24, the Somerset Group, its owner John Syms and his wife Eileen filed suit in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of New York against the federal government and Olin Corporation

due to environmental contamination of the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works (LOOW) in the Towns of Porter and Lewiston, Niagara County.

In 1970, the Somerset Group acquired 132 acres of LOOW property without knowledge of the contamination, and still owns 39 acres of the contaminated property. The Syms property was contaminated with radioactive waste from the Manhattan Project, as well as toxic and explosive chemicals from various defense programs conducted at LOOW, including a TNT factory, and a rocket fuel plant operated by Olin. It is less than one half mile from the Niagara Falls Storage Site (NFSS), the government storage area for radioactive waste from nuclear weapons. The plaintiffs' efforts to develop an industrial park on the site were stymied by a 1972 abatement order issued by the New York State Department of Health, prohibiting any use of the site due to radioactive contamination.

By 1992, the Government presented that the radioactive contamination had been removed from the Site to the NFSS. However, with recent reports that the NFSS is leaking, which is connected to the property via a drainage ditch, and through recent testing conducted by the Army Corps of Engineers, which discovered explosive, toxic and asbestos waste contamination on the property, plaintiffs filed the action to demand immediate remediation of their property.

Although the Syms have cooperated with ongoing efforts of the Department of Defense to conduct an investigation of the contaminated property, the investigation has been ongoing for many years with no remediation in sight. The government has failed to address numerous environmental concerns on the property and in the community surrounding the site and the LOOW. "The time has come for the government to start cleaning up the property and the LOOW in order to protect this community", said John Syms. The plaintiffs seek \$25 million in damages, largely arising out of their inability to use the land or conduct business on their property due to the contamination. Their claims arise under federal and state environmental statutes, and common law theories including public nuisance.

The plaintiffs are represented by environmental lawyers Linda Shaw and Alan Knauf from the Rochester law firm of Knauf Koegel & Shaw, LLP. Ronald Kuis, an environmental attorney and registered professional nuclear engineer from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, has been acted as a technical expert on the case. "The property at issue in this case should have never been sold by the government to private citizens. Given the new information being revealed about radiation levels outside of the NFSS, the Syms site, the NFSS and all of the contaminated LOOW property should be a top priority for immediate cleanup by the federal government", said attorney Linda Shaw. A trial date has not been set. (8/25)

Beaches On Lake Erie Closed Again

The Erie County Health Department ordered public beaches on Lake Erie closed Friday, 8/3, due to increased bacteria levels in the water. Those levels were blamed on the increased rainfall Western New York has received in July and early August. Increased rainfall usually results in increased pollution from run-off of farmland where large farms deposit enormous quantities of untreated animal waste. The quantities are so large that natural biological action can not handle the decomposition adequately. The waste runs off into streams and the oxygen demand in the water soars while the animal waste bacteria flows right along to where streams eventually empty into the Lake. Additionally, lake-front residential areas with inadequate septic systems contribute to the problem. The lake beaches were closed "until further notice." (8/4)

Canadian Power Plant ID'ed As Cause Of Increased Buffalo Ozone Levels