

CONTAMINANTS: *State Attorney General Dennis Vacco deserves praise for his push to make the federal government clean up a mess they helped create.*

Chalk up an environmental victory for state Attorney General Dennis Vacco. At his request, a court has cleared the way for a federal cleanup of the badly contaminated Guterl Steel site in Lockport.

Vacco stepped in last month to protest a plan by the property's trustee to abandon the 9.1 acre site and pay the remaining \$1.3 million of the steel company's assets to creditors, primarily the federal Economic Development



Dennis Vacco

Agency. The trustee's outrageous plan would have left Western New York holding the bag for a waste site the federal government helped create then profited from in a subsequent sale. The ruling sets things straight by allowing use not only of the remaining assets, as Vacco requested, but also nearly \$9 million from the sale of a large portion of the site to Allegheny Ludlum Steel Corp.

Vacco's efforts, including a letter to U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno, helped defuse what he had called an "environmental time bomb." Guterl had operated a 70-acre steel mill on the property until about 1983. But from 1948-56, operations included manufacture of uranium rods and the milling of thorium under contract with the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission. The 9 acres left after the sale to Allegheny is heavily contaminated with both radioactive soil and chemicals in badly corroded containers. Adding to the danger is the explosive potential of several compressed gas cylinders in one of the buildings, Vacco said.

It is incredible that the Economic Development Agency originally had opposed using any of the \$10 million to clean up the site. The radioactive waste came from a federal project, and the \$10 million was in their pocket, available for a cleanup. One would think, after the Love Canal and Forest Glen environmental disasters, that the feds would have learned to take immediate, decisive action to eliminate a public health threat.

Niagarans can breathe a sigh of relief that this toxic nightmare can have a safe conclusion. We commend Vacco for his efforts and applaud the ruling of Judge Bernard Markovitz.

Cleanup overdue at Guterl

NIAGARA GAZETTE

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