

WEATHER

Today's High **79°**

Tonight's Low **67°**



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Lockport UNION-SUN & Journal

50¢

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Study calls Simonds radiation negligible

By **Scott Leffler**
Lockport Journal

Radiation levels at the former Simonds Saw and Steel plant in Lockport are negligible, according to the project manager for the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education in Oak Ridge, Tenn.

Timothy J. Viktus said his company studied the Ohio Street site in December 1999 and found that radiation levels are about the same as

background, or natural radiation.

Simonds was thrust into the national spotlight last week when it was featured in a USA Today series concerning nuclear contract work for the federal government.

Between 1948 and 1956, Simonds rolled 25 million to 35 million pounds of uranium and 30,000 to 40,000 pounds of thorium into billets for fuel rods for nuclear reactors.

USA Today investigative

reporter Peter Eisler said he chose to feature Simonds because employees suffered inexplicable illnesses and because the site has not been cleaned up.

The Oak Ridge study indicates there is not much to be cleaned up.

Viktus said, "The biggest hazard at that site is the dilapidated buildings."

He said airline pilots endure more radiation in a day than someone who might spend a day inside

one of the contaminated Simonds buildings.

Viktus said he and his team tested the buildings, air and soil at the site. Readings for radioactivity from uranium and thorium came back positive, but not in exceedingly high levels.

"Are they screaming hot? No."

"Uranium is not known for having any significant gamma exposure," he said. "Uranium is primarily an alpha emitter, and it's not

considered an external hazard," he explained.

The alpha exposure couldn't pass through a piece of paper, much less human skin, he said. "If you picked up pure uranium and sniffed it, you would probably get a dose to your lungs ... but there's no pure uranium there."

Thorium levels at the site are practically nonexistent, he added,

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Experts: West Nile virus here for good

By **Karen Matthews**
The Associated Press

NEW YORK West Nile virus is here to stay, but the public should neither panic



Clinton defeats doctor

By **Marc Humbert**
The Associated Press



Maziarz says residue must come out

By Scott Leffler
Lockport Journal

Radioactive waste at the vacant, abandoned Simonds Saw and Steel site in Lockport must be removed, State Sen. George D. Maziarz, R-North Tonawanda, said Tuesday.

He said he has spoken with representatives of the state Department of Conservation and that both he and the department agree on removal.

Maziarz said the Department of Energy and the Army Corps of Engineers frequently have two options for environmental remediation: on-site remediation, where the focus is to conceal

and contain, and actual removal.

He said, "I let the DEC know that (on-site remediation) is unacceptable in my mind. They agree with me, and they're in constant contact with the Corps of Engineers. I'm putting pressure on the DEC to make sure the method is removal."

Maziarz also said that since the primary customer for the radioactive products was the federal government, they should be held responsible for the costs of the cleanup.

The corps announced last week that it plans to add the Simonds site to its list of 18 sites on the Formerly Utilized Sites Remediation



Photo by Dennis Siferer, Lockport Journal

The former Simonds Saw and Steel plant on Ohio Street.

Program (FUSRAP).

Candy Walters, a public

affairs specialist with the corps offices in Washington, D.C., said she does not know when the takeover will occur, when the property will be cleaned up or which remediation procedure will be followed.

Maziarz said, "I think that the federal government is stepping up to the plate" by asking the corps to assess the site.

The Simonds site was featured last week in a USA Today series dealing with federal government contract work at approximately 100 plants nationwide in the 1940s and 1950s. The work involved radioactive substances.

The series noted that

workers at the plants were sometimes not told they were handling radioactive substances and that proper safety procedures were not in place.

Between 1948 and 1956, Simonds workers processed 25 million to 35 million pounds of uranium and 30,000 to 40,000 pounds of thorium.

About 9.1 acres that is still considered contaminated is vacant.

Maziarz said that there have been chemical cleanups in his district but that the Simonds site is the first radioactive cleanup.

"I've dealt a lot with hazardous waste, but I guess I'll never get used to it," he said.

Simonds: Researcher says radiation didn't stay

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because there was significantly less thorium rolled at the site than uranium.

Viktus also said the radiation from uranium and thorium doesn't have a tendency to migrate; rather, it stays with the source — in this case the billets produced on the site.

"It (the radiation) doesn't just jump out and stick to you," he said.

Viktus spent two weeks at the site without feeling any effects of the radiation there. "We monitor ourselves, obviously," he said, "When we left, no one had any radiation on them."

The Oak Ridge Institute was commissioned to do the report by the property trustee, Stanley Makaroff of Pittsburgh.

order to find out how the property would have to be cleaned up. He said that over the past 16 years, since he first became trustee, he has had only one prospective buyer.

When that party learned of the site's history, Makaroff said, he backed out.

Referring to the 1999 Oak Ridge study, Makaroff said, "It's total and complete." He said it cost more than \$100,000.

The report itself details the history of the site since 1948. According to the report:

Uranium and thorium were rolled under two separate contracts. Uranium was rolled from 1948 until 1952 under a contract with the New York Operations Office of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), predecessor of

from the AEC with the National Lead of Ohio, which extended the plant activities until 1956.

Residue from the operation was returned to the AEC. The Department of Energy's Niagara Falls Storage Site, within the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works was used for interim storage.

More than 99 percent of the work involved uranium. It was rolled on a 16-inch rolling mill in Building 8, where "elevated radiation levels" have been found.

The Oak Ridge report says steps were taken to protect the workers.

The AEC was responsible for providing radiological monitoring and safety guidance and assistance. Protective measures included the use of hoods and dust collection equipment over the 16-inch rolling mill stands, and catch pans in the

mill area was vacuumed after each batch of 16 ingots, and the shipping area was vacuumed daily.

The Oak Ridge inspection of the site in December 1999 was not the first at the plant.

A radiological survey was performed in 1958 — two years after the government work had stopped — by the Nuclear Science and Engineering Corporation/Carborundum Metals.

Area decontamination was performed and clean steel plates were placed over the area.

In December 1958, a second radiological survey was performed. The survey found that "decontamination was effective."

In 1976, Oak Ridge National Laboratory performed another radiological survey to determine the status of the Simonds property

The survey found that most of the residual contamination remaining from the uranium and thorium rolling operations was confined to the areas inside and immediately outside Buildings 6 and 8.

In 1980, the Department of Energy determined that the site needed to be cleaned up, but four years later, it decided it did not have the authority to do the work. The reason: The federal government and Simonds had agreed to a "hold harmless" clause in their contracts.

Last week, the Army Corps of Engineers announced that it will survey the site for remediation possibilities, according to Candy Walters, a public affairs specialist for the corps.

She said she doesn't know when the remediation will begin what it