

TNT unearthed in Lewiston

Crew cleaning former Defense site finds explosive crystals near pipe

By Lisa Marie Danish
Niagara Gazette

LEWISTON — Explosives experts working to clean up former Department of Defense land in the Town of Lewiston found about 8-ounces of suspected crystalline TNT near an old pipeline last week and are asking the county for permission to safely dispose of it at the site.

Concerned about the prospect of any on-site incineration of TNT, the Lewiston Environmental Commission is planning to conduct a special meeting Wednesday to speak with the project's head engineer, said Jim Alleh, commission chairman. The county has asked the commission to approve its request to let the Army Corps of Engineers

properly incinerate the material. Bill Kowalewski, the corps' project engineer for the Lake Ontario Ordnance Works site, said the Corps is interested in disposing of the material quickly because it is costly to secure the site and discontinue work in that area.

The 2-inch-by-2-inch pile of yellow-orange crystals was discovered late last week in one of the test pits the Corps is digging as part of its removal of a waste water pipeline, he said. This pipeline network is one of two being removed on the site, located roughly between Balmer, Pletcher, Porter-Center and Creek roads, east of the Lewiston-Porter School District campus in Lewiston.

A field test of the material registered positive for TNT, but the corps sent a

sample to a laboratory Monday to be assured of the reading and to determine the concentration of the material, Kowalewski said.

"In the meantime, if it is crystalline TNT, we would collect it, stabilize it with mineral oil, put it in a 55-gallon steel drum with firewood and kerosene, and incinerate it on the site," Kowalewski said. "It's the safest way to get rid of this sort of TNT."

While the corps awaits approval from the county, the material has been stabilized and the area has been guarded around the clock. Two or three explosives experts have also been walking along the entire pipeline, located on Chemical Waste Management property, to check for additional volatile material,

Kowalewski said.

Although the pipeline carried water used as a final rinse in TNT production, Kowalewski said he did not rule out that the Corps would find more TNT in the pipeline because residual TNT might have slipped into the pipes over the course of time.

"We're not going to do any large-scale burning on the site," Kowalewski said, "we're just going to deal with that material now because it's a known hazard."

Should the Corps' worst-case scenario prove true, and larger quantities of crystalline TNT are found in another section of the pipeline, another method would be considered, he said.

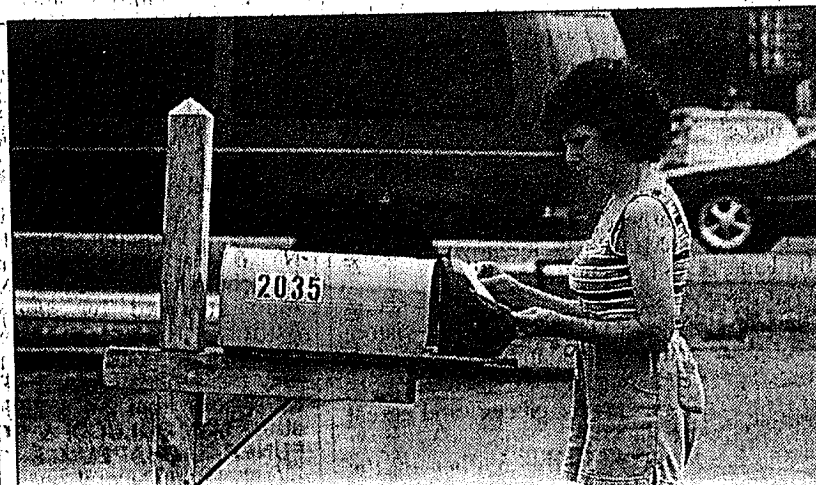
"We just haven't decided what our game plan would be."

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