

Tonawanda backed by DEC on cleanup

Storing waste in town opposed

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The state Department of Environmental Conservation has added its voice to the chorus of residents who oppose a U.S. Department of Energy proposal to clean up four radioactive sites in the Town of Tonawanda and store the waste in the town.

The state's opposition to the cleanup proposal was announced to about 160 people during a public hearing Wednesday sponsored by the Coalition Against Nuclear Materials in Tonawanda (CANiT), a group of local elected officials who have banded together on the waste issue.

State environmental Commissioner Thomas C. Jorling wrote the Energy Department in support of the group's position — that land be cleaned up enough for unrestricted use and that the waste be taken to a storage facility in Utah.

The 350,950 cubic yards of contaminated waste is left over from the Manhattan Project, the effort to build the first atomic bomb, in 1940s. It is at four sites along the Thruway and River Road in the Town of Tonawanda.

"The state's position adds weight to what we've been doing here in Tonawanda," said Legislator Leonard R. Lenihan, D-Tonawanda. "We now have to take the fight to the federal level."

Residents at the hearing objected to having a nuclear-waste storage cell in the populated suburban town and along the Niagara River, where it could threaten the area's drinking water.

Legislator Charles M. Swanick, D-Kenmore, criticized the Energy Department for overestimating the cost of transporting the contaminants to an out-of-state facility. Federal documents estimated the cost at \$39.4 million, but Conrail can do the job for at least \$10 million less, he said.

Under the revised figures, taking the waste out of town would cost about \$201 million, compared to \$59 million to build a storage site along the river.

"(The Energy Department) originally estimated it would cost \$187 million to clean up. Now they want to save money over the lives of the people who live here," said City of Tonawanda resident John Krenitsky. "It's time they put their money where their mouth is and cleaned up the site properly."