

Bee Editorial

Don't blame messenger for federal foulup

Members of the Coalition Against Nuclear Materials in Tonawanda are hopping mad about the federal Department of Energy's plans to store radioactive waste in the town and near its precious waterfront region. They should be.

However, we feel they need to go about their protest in a slightly different way. Sending a letter to the secretary of the DOE is an excellent start, because the top brass in Washington need to learn directly that the locals are not at all pleased with the short sighted plan offered as a solution to the situation in the town.

They should also question the dedication of the local Washington delegation in this fight to clean up the town. After all, the area representatives and senators have been relatively quiet on this and it may take a little prodding to get their noteworthy seniority behind an effort to push this garbage out of here. Especially with Senator Alfonse D'Amato, who has come to the

town's rescue before, a little prodding could do wonders for the situation.

However, to attack Ron Kirk, the project manager in the DOE's Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program in Tonawanda, doesn't seem to be quite as well thought out. It reminds us of slaying the messenger for delivering the message. Yes, he is the man who was responsible for the study done here, but we don't see how one person following the edicts of the federal government and its misguided processes should shoulder the blame for the DOE's current recommendation.

One thing in particular strikes us as silly. To come to its decision, the DOE includes two modifying criteria — state and community standards. In neither case has the DOE recommendation of building a storage cell just off River Road for roughly 360,000 cubic yards of waste come even close to receiving any support. And yet, the DOE has said there is still no

reason to change its plan to this point.

Yes, that statement was made by Kirk. But before someone calls for a public hanging, it seems that he is serving as the sacrificial spokesman in a twisted DOE plot.

Members of CANIT have said all along they believe the DOE has had its mind made up from the beginning and that the waste was never intended to move beyond the town line. What used to sound a little paranoid is ringing more true by the day.

Destroying the town's long range plans for building a glorious waterfront is only one of the potential tragedies if this DOE proposal remains unchanged. In the bigger picture, it could mean similarly affected communities will face the same fate, which is unacceptable. We hope local officials will lean hard on the area's Washington delegation and we'd like to see some action taken down there. However, blaming one man who is just doing his job for a problem of this scope seems to be misdirected energy. If you want to solve a problem like this, start at the top.