

N-waste in Tonawanda could be treated, studies show

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Preliminary studies show that it may be possible to chemically extract radioactive material from Town of Tonawanda nuclear-waste sites, a federal official said Monday.

The results of the studies, commissioned by the the U.S. Department of Energy, were disclosed during a meeting between community and federal officials in the department's Tonawanda office along Sheridan Drive.

One such study, by Clemson Technical Center, determined that chemical treatment eliminated as much as 62 percent of the contaminants. Although still far below federal cleanup standards, department officials

were heartened enough to order more research to determine whether that level could be increased significantly.

Another study, conducted for the department by the National Air and Radiation Environmental Laboratory, a branch of the Environmental Protection Agency, also concluded that chemical extraction "showed promise."

A U.S. Bureau of Mines study for the department did not recommend any treatment method considered thus far for removing the material.

"The DOE is prepared to move to the next step," Ron Kirk, the department's Tonawanda site manager, said in a meeting with community leaders. He said the department also is waiting to see whether the treatment

is cost-effective.

Town of Tonawanda Supervisor Carl J. Calabrese said he was surprised by the findings of the studies, which were ordered at the request of the community.

"I expected to be told that no effective technology existed (to treat the waste)," he said. "There may be some room for cautious optimism."

Even if the research eventually shows that such methods would not work for the Town of Tonawanda, they could be used at other sites — potentially cutting costs and freeing up federal funds for the town, he said.

Currently, there are nearly 8,000 tons of low-level radioactive waste stored at four sites in the town. Cleanup of the waste,

from the Manhattan Project to build the first atomic bomb, has been under study for more than five years.

Community leaders favor hauling the waste out of town, which the Department of Energy has rejected as too costly — about \$201 million. The department has proposed storing the waste in a cell along the Niagara River.

Kirk said the additional research ordered by the department would be concluded by the end of October, at a cost of about \$250,000.

At that time, the Department of Energy will decide whether it wants to pursue the soil treatment. If so, the department would likely start with a pilot project, Kirk said.