

# Study to pinpoint radioactivity

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A study is under way to determine how much radioactive waste is stored at the former Seaway Industrial site in the Town of Tonawanda, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officials said.

The Corps will use the information to determine what impact the toxic materials have on the environment and residents.

"We're trying to get a better idea of what's going on in the landfill," said David J. Conboy, project engineer for the Corps. "We're looking forward to coming out with more information and coming out with a positive solution."

Findings of the study, which started this month, will be released in early 2002, officials said.

About 6,000 cubic yards of low-grade uranium residue are stored at the 100-acre site, which officials said comes from uranium processing at Union Carbide's Linde Air Products division. The waste is a byproduct of the Manhattan Project, which developed the nation's early atomic weapons.

The residue left at Seaway was produced between 1942 and 1946, when Linde was contracted to process uranium for atomic weapons, Conboy said. The company used acid to leech uranium out of the ore, leaving behind radium, thorium and some uranium.

The waste was transported to Ashland No. 1, then a disposal site for the Manhattan Project, where it was buried. When the Ashland Oil Co. purchased the property, it excavated some of the waste and deposited it at the Seaway and Ashland No. 2 sites.

A portion of the Seaway site is being cleaned up in conjunction with the Ashland

A nine-acre section of the Seaway site was sampled earlier this month, where 40 percent of the Manhattan Project material is covered by garbage and other debris that is 10-feet thick.

In two other areas of the site, waste material is covered with up to 40 feet of fill material and refuse over a three-acre area.

"It makes it a challenge to overcome," Conboy said. "We needed a special type of drill."

The rotasonic drill uses high frequency sounds to cut through the surface and produce core samples which will be tested. Conboy said the tests will determine how much waste is contained on site and whether its chemical makeup would allow it to leech into groundwater.

Testing also will be done to ensure safety to residents and the community, Conboy said. Because the chemicals are insoluble in water, they likely would not leak from the site, even without preventative measures in place, he said. Uranium is suspected of causing some types of cancer.

The contamination is in the middle of the town's industrial hub, once the lifeline of prosperity for the area. Efforts are under way to revitalize the tract of land with incentives for potential developers.

The Corps' cleanup efforts aren't expected to impact a proposed Empire Development Zone immediately adjacent to the Seaway site, said Robert L. Dimmig, executive director of the Town of Tonawanda Development Corp.

The zones offer tax incentives to attract developers and businesses. The zone makes up a 300-acre tract, extending from the Seaway site to Consolidated Freight along the Niagara River to Fire Tower Drive, south.

Likely occupants include warehouses and distribution centers whose owners may not be so concerned with the land's toxicity.

"The impact depends on the company," Dimmig said. "Even if you tell them something's cleaned up, if it's a sensitive industry such as the food industry, those people more often than not would not look at the facility."

He said the proposed development site is already attracting significant interest from light industries and large companies that are interested in the tax incentives offered by the state program.

"We hope that we will attract a developer to purchase the property and put in an infrastructure," he said.