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No health threat found in radioactive area

By T.J.PIGNATARO
News Northtowns Bureau
3/30/2002

The Town of Tonawanda landfill and mud flats area off the Youngmann Expressway, which has been confirmed as radioactively contaminated, does not pose a public health threat as it is now being used, according to preliminary findings by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The corps recently made the determination after examining soil and ground water samples it collected last summer from the area as well as looking at land use and a risk assessment based on potential human exposure to the contamination.

"The end result is that we can confidently say to the community this site is safe for its current uses," said [redacted] project manager for the corps.

The corps, meanwhile, is awaiting a detailed report and results from tests on the nearly 500 soil samples it took in 200 areas of the property from July to September. That information, expected to be available in April or May, will be followed by a public information session, officials said.

According to the corps, the health assessment accounts for "recreational user scenarios" such as walking and bicycling.

"Even though the site is located on a sanitary landfill and private property owned by the Town of Tonawanda, we have seen evidence of dirt bikes and people walking dogs, so we know the community is using the site. And the preliminary results confirm the site falls within acceptable U.S. Environmental Protection Agency guidelines for this use," [redacted] said.

Corps officials said the site contains "naturally occurring uranium" as well as thorium and radium.

The health risks associated with the contamination are deemed to be within acceptable federal limits, however, because of the type of activities being conducted on the land.

Since the land is not used for residential purposes and those who do choose to use it recreationally are subjected to only "very limited exposure," the current use of the land is "permissible under current federal guidelines," said [redacted]

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██████████ risk assessor for the corps' Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program.

The corps, meanwhile, is continuing to investigate the site as a "vicinity property of the Linde Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program."

A "vicinity property" apparently has not been used for any activity involving radioactive elements, but such material might have been moved there from the primary site, Linde Air Products, where materials were processed during World War II for the Manhattan Project.

██████████ Buffalo District program manager for the Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program, said the corps still was trying to determine whether the materials come from Linde.

"There are no records that show material coming from there, and the material itself does not seem to have a high correlation to the other material (from the Linde property). We're trying to figure that out," ██████████ said.

Once the "investigation stage" is completed, the corps will examine various alternatives for the site, including any need for a complete cleanup, he said.

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