



Bee Editorial

DOE should move waste out of town

Several weeks ago in this space, we gave the opinion that the U.S. Department of Energy was acting in what it felt was the best interests of the people of the Town of Tonawanda in its long range planning system for the radioactive waste left in the town after Linde's involvement in the Manhattan District Engineering project of the 1940s. At that time, we said that unless its decision showed otherwise, the DOE had to be listened to due to its expertise in the subject area.

Almost immediately after the decision was announced, that opinion changed. In this week of losing football analogies, it's safe to say that while the DOE may have picked up its own fumble, it is clearly running the wrong way.

There are more than 350,000 cubic yards of contaminated waste in the town at four sites. The DOE wants to put as much of that as is

easily accessible into one new containment cell on what it calls the Ashland I property, a small parcel adjacent to the BFI landfill off River Road. That would put waste of a truly unknown danger quotient (despite what scientists might believe, there's no absolute quality to anything that volatile) within a couple hundred yards of one of the great fresh water resources in North America.

To say that is ridiculous is understating things. The DOE seems ready to stick by its guns, citing cost figures, the dangers of moving such material a great distance and other factors. Federal engineers and scientists claim the protection of the storage cell they propose would be more than adequate to meet any standards. However, that is in a perfect world. As was mentioned at last week's public hearing, the cell itself would become contaminated, thereby

making the site more dangerous; the fact that we live in a unstable seismological area makes such a prospect even more unsafe.

Perhaps the greatest concern over all of this is not the immediate health concerns but the effect of such a storage facility on the plans for the waterfront and how any potential danger so close to the scene would affect those plans. A major portion of this area's economic future lies in the possibilities for the waterfront. Putting radioactive waste in close proximity to land that is projected for major residential and commercial development is a major mistake.

In short, what seemed like a prudent course of following the DOE's lead turned out to be a white-knuckle trip. The waste in Tonawanda does not belong here where there are remote desert areas licensed to handle such material. Spend the money that is available and get the material out of here. We shouldn't have to pay for past government mistakes.