

METROPOLITAN NEWS

Tonawanda waste site plans shelved

U.S. Energy Dept. tables proposal for consolidation of four existing N-dumps

By BARBARA O'BRIEN
News Staff Reporter

The U.S. Department of Energy no longer is considering consolidating nuclear waste from four Manhattan Project sites in the Town of Tonawanda at one location in the town.

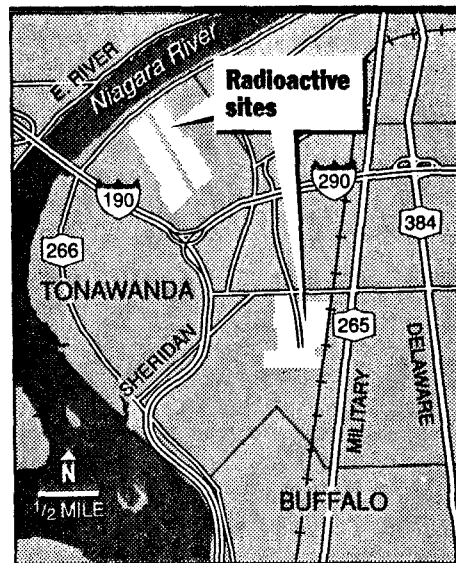
The department instead will re-examine the alternatives initially developed for cleaning up the four sites.

Thomas P. Grumbly, assistant secretary for the DOE's Office of Environmental Management, told Rep. John J. LaFalce, D-Town of Tonawanda, of the agency's decision Thursday to suspend the consolidation plan.

"DOE has decided to take the proposed on-site remediation plan for the Tonawanda wastes totally off the table," LaFalce said. "This reopening is total, and DOE has promised to solicit broad community input in examining all alternatives."

The decision and the plan to re-examine the alternatives will be outlined at a meeting at 4 p.m. Wednesday at the DOE's public information center, 810 Sheridan Drive.

LaFalce also said Grumbly also told him that the National Academy of Sciences will conduct an independent review of the DOE's plan to cap radioactive residues currently stored at the Niagara Falls Storage Site in Lewiston.



Buffalo News

The DOE has suspended the installation of the long-term cap.

"It's a step in the right direction," said Town of Tonawanda Supervisor Carl J. Calabrese. "It's exactly the kind of help we needed from Rep. LaFalce."

Calabrese, who wants the waste removed from the town, said he is convinced any plan to leave it there "would be a huge detriment to develop our waterfront."

LaFalce was criticized publicly last month by Calabrese and Erie County Legislator Charles M. Swanick, D-Kenmore, for "inactivity" on the issue.

Swanick and Calabrese sent a letter to Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary, claiming that the study was a "process with a predetermined result."

"I would think the public statement may have had some impact," Calabrese said. "I'm pleased if it did."

But LaFalce is convinced the quiet approach is responsible.

"They provide convincing evidence that quiet, persistent, behind-the-scenes communication and reasoning can get the government's attention," he said.

The low-level radioactive waste is a legacy of the Manhattan Project, which developed the atomic bomb during World War II. Uranium was processed here for Manhattan Project research in other parts of the country.

Four Town of Tonawanda sites now contain an estimated 8,000 tons of the radioactive wastes: the Seaway Industrial Landfill, two old Ashland refinery properties and the former Linde Air Products Corp. plant.

A five-year DOE technical study recommended combining the materials into one low-level radioactive waste storage facility on River Road in the town.

Residents, the town, Erie County and the state Department of Environ-

mental Conservation oppose leaving the waste in the town. Residents want it sent to a licensed facility in Utah.

LaFalce said shortly after the DOE recommended permanent storage of the approximately 350,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil in the town last November, he questioned that solution with DOE officials.

He said the DOE study does not adequately address a number of health-related issues, the potential migration of contaminants to the nearby Niagara River or the town's waterfront plans.

The assistant secretary agreed to analyze the issues raised by LaFalce, consider implementing innovative technologies to reduce the amount of waste and analyze the cost of removing that reduced waste, LaFalce said.

The Lewiston storage contains soils contaminated by low-level radioactive materials during the Manhattan Project and residues of uranium processing.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the state departments of Health and Environmental Conservation disagree with the Energy Department on its proposal to permanently store the residues at Lewiston.

A public meeting will be held at 4 p.m. Thursday at the site at 1397 Pletcher Road, Lewiston, to gather comments and explain the role of the National Academy of Sciences.