

Nuclear 'battle' steps up

By Brian Meyer
Correspondent

Critics of federal plans to keep thousands of tons of low-level radioactive waste in the Town of Tonawanda are intensifying their fight to have the material shipped to Utah.

Town Supervisor Carl Calabrese said Town Board members, local environmentalists and members of a coalition known as CANIT met Thursday with an official from the Utah-based nuclear waste storage facility. Eugene Gleason represents Envirocare of Utah and he told local officials that shipping the waste to a distant storage facility could be economically feasible.

At issue is the cleanup of 8,000 tons of waste at four separate sites in the town. Two of the sites are on the former Ashland Refinery property. The other sites are at the former Linde Corporation and the Seaway Industrial landfill. The low-level radioactive waste was shipped to the town in the 1940s for use in the World War II efforts to develop the atomic bomb.

The U.S. Department of Energy originally proposed moving the waste to one sprawling storage facility at a yet-to-be-determined site in the town. Faced with fierce public opposition, federal officials agreed to consider other cleanup options.

Members of the Coalition Against Nuclear Materials in Tonawanda (CANIT) have long supported shipping the waste to an out-of-state storage site.

"We believe the federal government has always overestimated the cost of moving the material to Utah and underestimated the costs of keeping it here. That point was driven home during our meeting with Mr. Gleason," Calabrese told the *NEWS* following the briefing.

He said the waste disposal expert is confident his company has techniques which could drastically cut the costs of shipping and storing the waste at a distant site. The federal government has estimated that moving the waste to Utah would cost \$201 million.

Calabrese said the Utah firm will be submitting a bid in July for a similar waste project in New Jersey. He expects the bid to confirm that shipment of such waste can be economically feasible.

The supervisor said it's frustrating that the federal government resists alternatives which would be more cost effective and environmentally sound.

"There seems to be too much bureaucracy and vested interest to allow common sense to play a role in this process," Calabrese lamented.

Meanwhile, he urged Congressman John LaFalce (D-Town of Tonawanda) to play a more vigilant role in putting pressure on federal officials to consider hauling the waste to the Utah storage facility.

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