



F.A.C.T.S.

(For A Clean Tonawanda Site)

"PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER"



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PRESS RELEASE

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**ANNOUNCEMENT OF PARTIAL RADIOACTIVE CLEANUP AT TONAWANDA NUCLEAR SITE
LEAVES IMPORTANT QUESTIONS UNANSWERED**

The decision by Energy Department Assistant Secretary Thomas Grumbly to start "interim remediation" of Union Carbide's former Linde facility (now Praxair, Inc.) this fall is certainly good news for the Tonawanda community and all residents of the Niagara Frontier region. It is especially good news for workers who over the years have faced increased exposure risks in some areas of the formerly utilized Manhattan Project facility.

The announcement calls for only a **partial** cleanup at the Linde site, one of the five properties comprising the entire Tonawanda Site. The other properties are the Town of Tonawanda Landfill, Seaway Landfill, Ashland #1 and Ashland #2.

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The announcement does not address important issues which were left unresolved when the required environmental review (EIS) process was suspended by DOE 14 months ago. Most important, what cleanup guidelines will be used to decontaminate the property? New York State guidelines are ten times more strict than DOE's cleanup criteria. The level of radioactive contamination remaining after cleanup under DOE guidelines would be ten times greater than under New York State guidelines. This is a very important issue because if DOE's cleanup criteria are used instead of New York's, the "cleaned" area will still pose a ten-fold greater risk of health effects such as cancers. By conducting an "interim remediation" outside the specified requirements of the normal EIS process, is DOE trying to avoid the application of New York State's more stringent cleanup guidelines?

The announcement calls for Buildings 14, 30, and 31 to be decontaminated and only Building 38 to be demolished and removed. In contrast, the community's preferred complete cleanup and removal (EIS Alternative #2) provides for the demolition and removal of all four buildings along with approximately 5,000 cubic yards of contaminated soils under the buildings. It seems unlikely that the DOE would perform an expensive, labor intensive decontamination of buildings if they had any thought of removing them at a later date. In comparison with EIS alternative #2 then, the announced "interim" cleanup of the Linde property will remove only a fraction of the total contamination present at this property.

This action does set an important precedent in that it provides for the much safer long-term management of the wastes at a much more suitable out-of-state location, as demanded by the Tonawanda community. However, since it only deals with part of the total contamination present at the Linde property, can we assume that the rest of the contamination at the total site will be similarly removed? At its March 14, 1995 meeting, Coalition Against Nuclear Materials in Tonawanda (CANiT) adopted the position that a gradual, staged cleanup of the five properties comprising the total Tonawanda Site would be accepted only if DOE made a commitment to eventual out-of-state disposal for all of Tonawanda's contaminated material. It is unclear at this point whether such a commitment has been made by DOE.

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With these and other questions unanswered and lacking completion of the required EIS decision process for the total site, the propriety of such an "interim" action is questionable.

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