

Praxair-Linde site cleanup is set to start in summer

By Joseph C. Genco
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The federal government attempted Monday to answer several issues raised by local citizens over the clean-up of radioactive waste buried in the Town of Tonawanda.

Ronald Kirk of the Department of Energy's Formerly Utilized Sites Program (FUSRAP) gave an hour-long presentation on the results of a study of the treatability of wastes, as well as discussing the proposed interim action at the Linde-Praxair sites.

His presentation got off to a slow start. James Rauch of "For a Clean Tonawanda Site" newsletter challenged Kirk on whether a review process for an earlier proposal had been completed.

Rauch contended the review could not have been completed because it required a DOE response to public comments and when he filed a Freedom of Information request for the compiled responses, he was told they did not exist. Yet Kirk seemed to make a reference to it.

Without a firm answer Kirk and FACTS compatriot Don Finch walked out.

Kirk then answered several long-standing questions about the FUSRAP action with regard to the sites in the town contaminated by radioactive waste left behind following the Manhattan Project of WWII.

The treatability study, he said, studied whether some form of waste processing was feasible.

"The scientists are never ready to give up," Kirk said, "but we have to decide from a project management standpoint if it is worthwhile to move forward."

He announced a schedule for proposed work at Linde Praxair to start next summer.

A Request for Proposals is under review by DOE and CANIT. It will be circulated to potential bidders by the end of the month, with contracts awarded in early December.

He said everything connected with the project will be completed with strict adherence to applicable regulation.

"We aren't going to violate environmental regulations. This is not important enough for anybody to risk their job over," he said.

He also attempted to answer the long-standing criticism of FACTS that clean-up will not meet state criteria. Kirk said New York State would be willing to consider clean-up according to "Industrial" standards, while DOE's proposed clean-up will be to "resident farmer" standards.

The resident farmer status considers potential exposure to waste through ground water, surface water and food grown on site.

Kirk said the major issue in such clean-ups is not usually worker safety.

"Most of what we get into with these jobs is an industrial safety issue, not a residential protection issue."