

# Feds slow radioactive dirt imports

SPOKANE (AP) — Federal regulators won't allow an Eastern Washington mining company to expedite its plan to import radioactive dirt from other states, including the radioactive sites in the Town of Tonawanda.

The Dawn Mining Co. has proposed shipping the dirt at taxpayer expense to fill a stadium-sized pit left over from its defunct uranium mining operation.

But the U.S. Department of Energy rejected Dawn Mining's application to proceed with the plan without competitive bids from other companies licensed to dispose of the low-level radioactive waste.

The company will have to wait while the Energy Department studies whether to move the waste from sites in New York and Missouri. That decision could be a couple years away, department spokeswoman Jane Brady said Monday.

If the Energy Department decides

the waste should be relocated, Dawn Mining will have to compete in an open bidding process for the right to haul and store it. Company officials had hoped to sidestep the longer process by submitting the proposal as an innovative solution to the waste disposal problem.

Dawn Mining shut down its uranium-processing mill near the small town of Ford, 25 miles northwest of Spokane, in 1982, leaving a giant pit that was about 10 percent filled with low-level radioactive wastes.

The 65-foot-deep pit covers 28 acres, is lined with black plastic and has filled partially with water. Ford residents fear contamination may leak into ground water.

The company's plan would ship mildly contaminated dirt and sand from uranium dump sites in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y., and St. Louis, Mo., to fill the pit.

Dawn Mining officials want taxpayers to pay the company to ship

the waste to Ford. The deal could generate \$15 million to \$20 million to help pay for cleanup at the company's uranium mine on the nearby Spokane Indian Reservation, according to Bob Nelson, Dawn Mining general manager.

Without that money, Nelson said the company cannot afford to clean up its mine or the mill where the uranium ore was processed.

"There's no profit element here," Nelson said.

Denver's Newmont Mining Co., the largest mining company in North America, is majority owner of Dawn. But Dawn operates independently and cannot rely on the larger company to foot the bill, Nelson said.

Company officials are pressing forward with their proposal and are trying to generate support for the plan in New York and Missouri, where neighbors of the waste sites want the material moved to attract economic development.

The company has mounted a public relations campaign, hiring Jim Kneeland, a well-connected press secretary to former Gov. Booth Gardner.

In 1991, under Gardner, the state rejected Dawn's first proposal to import radioactive dirt from New Jersey. But the Lowry administration reversed that decision, and the company obtained a license from the state Department of Health last year for its import plan.

Environmental groups oppose the plan, arguing it violates a 1981 state law restricting radioactive waste imports.