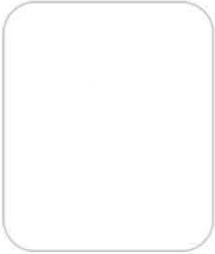


Schumer urges Army Corps to get moving on Tonawanda Landfill

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U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer addresses Tonawanda residents from a home at 85 Hackett Drive, which borders the Tonawanda Landfill. He said his purpose in town was to urge the Army Corps of Engineers to get moving on a plan to remediate the site. On Schumer's left is resident Joyce Hogenkamp and on his right is City of Tonawanda Mayor Rick Davis.

By Mia Summerson mia.summerson@niagara-gazette.com | Posted Yesterday

U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer visited the City of Tonawanda Monday morning to address the radioactive waste that has been sitting beneath the Tonawanda Landfill for decades.

The waste, which is mostly made up of uranium, is left over from the days of the Manhattan Project of World War II. While Schumer said that the threat isn't immediate, there is concern that as the soil erodes over time, the waste could become exposed and cause an adverse impact on the health of locals.

"It's hard to believe that we could be dealing with the aftermath of the Manhattan Project which created the atomic bomb 70 years ago," he said. "The piece of the Manhattan Project that made it's way to this corner of Western New York has become a completely unwelcome part of daily life."

The 55-acre landfill was used as a standard dumping ground from the 1930s up to 1989. Gallons of the waste came to this area when the U.S. Army contracted with Lindy Air to refine uranium as part of the Manhattan Project. Additional waste was placed in a ditch near Two Mile Creek Road and in the late '40s and early '50s, that waste was moved to the landfill.

The Army Corps of Engineers have conducted two studies to look into the health risks posed by the waste. While the first suggested that the health risk was minimal, the second said that when and if the natural erosion of the soil exposed the waste, neighbors, including the nearby Riverview Elementary School, could be in harm's way.

"It's sad because we've seen a lot of people move away because of conditions here," said City of Tonawanda Mayor Rick Davis. "A lot of illness, whether it can be attributed or not attributed to the landfill, that's up to scientists to prove. It really is a quality of life issue that the residents here in the City of Tonawanda deserve to have closure on to be able to get on with their lives."

Another issue Schumer cited was a decrease in funding for the Formally Utilized Site Remedial Action Program. In 2009 FUSRAP funding peaked at \$200 million, but was down to \$110 million this year and only \$100 million was budgeted for 2015. The federal government would be totally responsible for paying for this project. Schumer said he plans to fight for an increase in funding.

The Army Corps said they would be ready to put a remediation plan into action by the end of 2014. When the new year came and went with no plan, Schumer decided it was time to urge them to kick things up a notch.

"We are greatly appreciative of the senator's advocacy for getting this expedited," said Town of Tonawanda Supervisor Anthony Caruana. "And also to increase the funding."

According to Schumer the Army Corps of Engineers said they are working on developing a solution to the problem, but he feels they aren't working quickly enough. He acknowledged that in the past he has come to Western New York to successfully ask the Army Corps to move some projects up on their priority list, and he hopes they affirmatively respond to his request again this time.

The Army Corps' next goal will be to prepare a list of solutions to clean up the site and then work with local leaders to determine which route will be the most efficient and effective. The options will also shed some light on the price of the project, which Schumer said with confidence will cost millions of dollars.

"The residents of Tonawanda don't need a scientist or an engineer to tell them that when the Periodic Table of Elements is essentially living in your backyard, it's not a very good thing," Schumer said. "And this is the backyard of many residents."

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