

Springville Journal, Thursday, March 1, 2007

## In the interim

There isn't a household within 20 miles of the West Valley Demonstration Project that isn't directly or indirectly impacted by what goes on at the nuclear wastes reprocessing site which has been a blot on our local landscape for decades now.

Knowing that, it's been a pretty depressing stretch of time for the goings-on there. Whatever good news has come out of the WVDP lately has been a trickle. Concerns and uncertainty over what is going on there have been a torrent.

So bad is the situation that, at least from New York state's perspective (they own the land), officials felt they had no choice last fall but to file a lawsuit against the federal government over not only the pace of cleanup operations there, but in identifying and agreeing on a final Environmental Impact Statement regarding a myriad of long term issues including ultimate stewardship of the thousands of acres that make up the entire site.

On top of that comes recent word that the federal government is proposing a funding cut of some \$25 million for operations there, a move that officials of the West Valley Nuclear Services Company have indicated would bring meaningful cleanup efforts to a screeching halt. The cut would force WVNSCO to slash a third of its workforce, another dark cloud hanging over the entire operation, not to mention the issue who ultimately will win a new four-year cleanup contract that the U.S. Department of Energy is expected to award in the next month or two.

In the midst of the darkness, however, comes a ray of light. Whether it spreads into fully brilliant sunshine that illuminates the path to an ultimate end-game on which major stakeholders can agree is another matter altogether. But preliminarily, it seems as though many of them have shown favorable reaction to an "interim" end-state plan which has been drawn up by – eureka! – leaders actually at the West Valley site.

As chronicled in a special report last summer in the *Journal*, there are new faces in charge of the DOE's operations at the site, as well as at the top of the WVNSCO flow chart, and that is the answer to the question of what has changed that might allow meaningful forward progress to finally, mercifully be made.

While Albany and Washington higher-ups dicker and bicker over lawsuits and funding and who does what, perhaps the bridges being personally built between many different stakeholders locally is the most important work presently being conducted on site. Only in an air of mutual trust, respect and cooperation will West Valley's problems be solved. Obtaining those things won't, perhaps can't, fully happen at the state or federal level. Officials from afar would be wise to embrace and entrust the work and judgement of their own quality local personnel regarding the visions and solutions which are now being discussed. The genesis of the proper way forward lies here.

# Budget plan could slash W. Valley Demonstration workforce by 30 percent

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By BRIAN ACKLEY  
*Journal Editor*

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The workforce at the West Valley Demonstration Project could be slashed by 30 percent or more if a 2008 federal budget proposal becomes reality.

Sources have told the *Journal* that employees at the nuclear waste reprocessing site were told last Thursday (Feb. 22) at a company wide meeting that if the government's plan to spend just \$54.4 million next year on cleanup operations there would mean the layoff of what was termed "up to 100 key, highly skilled" personnel.

In 2006, the U.S. Department of Energy earmarked about \$73.4 million for the West Valley project, about 90 percent of the overall money spent there. The same amount is expected to be spent this year, officials at West Valley have indicated.

At that meeting, officials with West Valley Nuclear Services Corporation reportedly indicated that if spending was so drastically reduced in 2008, any work at the site would be reduced to a maintenance function only, and that field work next year could be trimmed by 75 percent.

When contacted Tuesday, WVNSCO Communications Administrator Terry Dunford had no comment on the information.

At the meeting, officials also indicated that the cutback could potentially hurt recent progress made toward completion of a final Environmental Impact Statement, which essentially would spell out the end game at West Valley, and what roles the state and federal governments will play regarding additional cleanup efforts and long term stewardship of the site.

Although no West Valley officials would speak on the record, sources have also indicated that a potential "significant" breakthrough may be on the horizon regarding the EIS. The lack of meaningful progress in recent years in finalizing such a document was in part the basis of a

(Continued on Page 3)

## *Enhanced interim end-state plan could be a big WV breakthrough...*

(Continued from Page 1)

lawsuit filed by New York State against the federal government last fall.

Sources said the possible breakthrough was termed as a "new enhanced interim end state," that involved most if not all of the major stakeholders at the site. WVNSCO officials also at last week's meeting indicated that both the Environmental Protection Agency and New York State Energy Research Development Authority have at least initially reacted favorably to the new plan. The DOE has created a so-called "core team" that meets regularly to try and move the EIS process along, although the EPA and NYSEERDA, two of the major players in the process, have not officially been represented at the core team parleys. Another such meeting is scheduled in early March.

Positive movement on an EIS could be a particularly important point, since a DOE official quoted in the February 5 issue of Weapons Complex Monitor said the funding cut was in part do to the uncertainty surrounding any long-term agreement on what should happen there.

"Once we know what the end state is, then we believe we can move out more smartly to direct our attention to those areas that we perhaps still cannot do because we don't know the end-state of the site," said James E. Rispoli, the DOE's Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management.

U.S. Representative Randy Kuhl, whose district includes the Demonstration Project, has said he will spearhead efforts to restore funding. In a speech on the Capitol floor in January, Kuhl highlighted many of the issues facing the site, including spread of a contaminated ground water plume. He termed that a "grave problem that threatens us all." He and officials at West Valley have indicated the plume is now threatening streams near the site which eventually feed into Lake Erie.

"The federal government has simply moved the ropes around the affected area," Kuhl said of efforts to contain the contaminated ground water.

"While there is little question that the waste is, in large part, federal waste, the federal government is now owning up to its responsibility to completely clean the site so that it can be returned to the community of West Valley and reused for economic development opportunities."

The federal government supplies about 90 percent of the money used toward cleanup efforts there, and the state, which actually owns the land, chips in around 10 percent.

At last week's employee meeting, WVNSCO also pointed out that if funding is cut by a third, it would make it very difficult to get additional money added back into the cleanup budget in future years.

Both the funding issues, and potential movement regarding the EIS, are expected to be topics of discussion on Wednesday, Feb. 28, at the regular monthly meeting of the West Valley Citizen's Task Force. The meeting was held after Journal deadline for this week's edition.

## LOCAL NEWS

WEST VALLEY

# New plan may provide breakthrough to galvanize stalled N-waste cleanup

By JOHN F. BONFATTI

NEWS STAFF REPORTER

In a breakthrough that may signal movement on the stalled nuclear waste cleanup at West Valley, federal officials are discussing a new plan that would include demolition of the 41-year-old plant that prompted the cleanup.

The Buffalo News has learned an Energy Department proposal, dubbed "the way forward," would concentrate on such potentially resolvable problems as the old nuclear fuel reprocessing plant, which currently holds 275 canisters of deadly radioactive waste behind thick concrete walls.

Those canisters would be removed from the plant, placed in shielded containers and stored in a secure area on site, much as spent fuel now is stored at most of the country's nuclear power plants until the government builds a long-term waste repository, possibly Yucca Mountain, Nev.

The plant then would be decontaminated and torn down, and the soil beneath it would be removed.

The plan also would deal with another issue raised by cleanup advocates: a plume of contaminated groundwater that some environmentalists say eventually will find its way into Lake Erie, a source of drinking water for mil-

lions of area residents.

Bryan Bower, the Energy Department's site director, said a "core team" of federal and state agencies — including his department, the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the state Health Department and Department of Environmental Conservation — has been reviewing a number of options.

"We are working closely with the core team, and we have had some very positive meetings," Bower said.

The plan got an additional boost Thursday when the regional office of the federal Environmental Protection Agency, which will have to sign off on any cleanup, endorsed the concepts under discussion.

"We think this is a big step forward," said Alan Steinberg, the EPA's regional administrator. "These are very major initiatives."

Environmentalists who have pushed for a cleanup since the 1970s generally were encouraged by the concepts, which would lead to what federal officials have called an "enhanced interim end state" for the site.

"It does suggest that there is pressure in the [Energy Department] to move forward with more cleanup," said Judy Einach, director of the Coalition on West Valley

Nuclear Wastes.

"This is a step in the right direction," said Lee Lambert, a long-time activist and member of the Citizens Task Force monitoring the cleanup.

A spokesman for Rep. John R. "Randy" Kuhl, R-Hammondsport, whose district includes West Valley, said Kuhl was also pleased.

"Our biggest problem to date has been with the DOE digging in its heels, so the fact that the EPA is helping this move forward is a good thing," said spokesman Bob Van Wicklin.

A partnership between the DOE and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority led to a landmark \$2.2 billion, 20-year cleanup that removed 600,000 gallons of dangerous liquid waste from leaking underground tanks and turned it into the solid canisters now stored in the old plant.

But since that 2002 accomplishment, the partnership has turned acrimonious, as the agencies argued over other environmental hazards, including two nuclear waste dumps, an acceptable level of decontamination and who will monitor the site in coming years.

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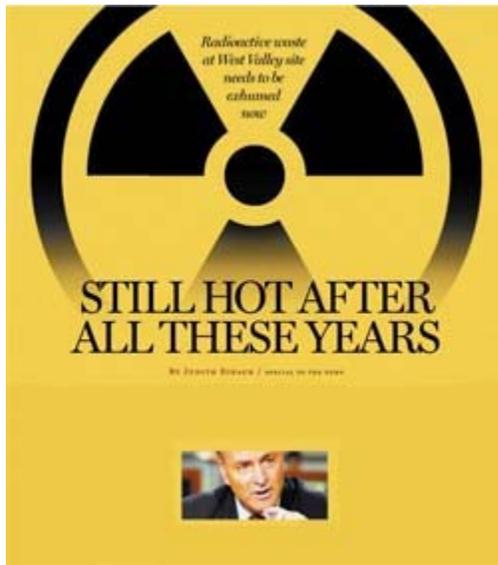
## Opinion

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### STILL HOT AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

Radioactive waste at West Valley site needs to be exhumed now

3/4/2007



As residents of one of the most contaminated states in the nation, and as residents of the most heavily contaminated region within New York, we live with a terrible array of toxins. The most lethal are radioactive.

According to Sen. Charles E. Schumer, we have "one of the greatest concentrations of facilities involved in nuclear weapons production-related activities in the nation." Prior to the importation of nuclear materials, there was no nuclear threat in Western New York. Today we are besieged.

Niagara, Erie and Cattaraugus counties play host to 14 nuclear sites. The Cattaraugus site in West Valley houses more than 1 million curies of radioactivity. This is huge, hot, deadly and the nation's most complex mix of nuclear and hazardous wastes.



Every day, strontium 90 leaks into the ground water and into a creek feeding larger creeks that empty, in turn, into Lake Erie upstream from the water intake valves for Buffalo and Erie County. Quoting an honored environmental adage, "Dilution is not the solution."

Concerned about the leaking radioactivity, Citizen Task Force members, who provide advice on cleanup, closure and long-term management of the West Valley nuclear site, sent a letter to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Its reply showed no particular concern. However, within the last two weeks,

Harry Scull Jr./Buffalo News

A major release of the radioactivity from the West Valley nuclear site would make much of Western New York uninhabitable.

we have heard Department of Energy officials say that the leak and other issues are under discussion, and that they are investigating ways to address these problems. Is this temporary appeasement or will we see a real commitment to the more challenging and costly aspects of cleanup? New Yorkers are twice-taxed to safeguard these wastes. We have contributed more than \$200 million in state tax dollars in addition to our federal contribution. We are heavily invested. Our voice should matter.

The only state that owns land housing federal nuclear wastes is New York. Politicians

concocted this arrangement when atomic energy was viewed as the answer to future energy needs and as lucrative economic development, much like corn-based ethanol is viewed today. Government officials saw the nuclear industry as a way to enrich friends at the expense of sound energy policy and the public interest. Commercial reprocessing of nuclear wastes was sold just like today's silver bullets - jobs at any cost.

The Hamlet of West Valley in the Town of Ashford was targeted for the nation's first, and thus far only, commercial nuclear reprocessing facility. To establish the facility, federal government initiated a public/private partnership involving federal and state government and Nuclear Fuel Services, a private company.

There was no commercial demand for reprocessing nuclear wastes. The business was doomed to fail. While it operated, the Department of Defense scored a big win. For five years, the Defense Department supplied nuclear wastes for reprocessing, which extracted weapons-grade plutonium and uranium that were returned to the department for our arsenal.

Under Nuclear Fuel Services' management, accidents contaminated the land, water and people. Radioactive isotopes, traceable to West Valley, were found in the Great Lakes as far away as Rochester. Family members of employees tell stories of quiet monetary settlements to workers sickened by dangerous exposures.

Reprocessing occurred from 1966 to 1972. By 1972, the government knew more about the dangers of radioactivity and established more stringent regulations. The owners of Nuclear Fuel Services, at this time Getty Oil Co., refused to spend the money to comply with tougher regulations. New York tried unsuccessfully to hold the company liable. In 1982, the NRC ended the company's authority and responsibility and made the New York Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) the sole licensee of the site.

President Jimmy Carter outlawed commercial reprocessing of nuclear wastes. President Bush wants to overturn that decision. He has committed our nation to the expansion of nuclear energy worldwide. As many as 13 sites are under consideration for a new commercial reprocessing facility. There is a 400-fold increase, \$395 million, in the president's budget for nuclear fuel reprocessing.

Skeptical critics contend commercial reprocessing is still not viable. Bush pushes reprocessing as a way to mitigate nuclear wastes, but the most modern technologies fail to do the job. New reprocessing plants are also sold as a way to control the proliferation of nuclear weapons, but experts on both sides of the debate admit expansion of nuclear power and nuclear weapons proliferation are inseparable. The majority of Americans, understanding the dangers, oppose nuclear energy. What is not common knowledge is that it takes so much fossil fuel to produce one nuclear fuel rod that there is no energy gain. That inefficiency, along with the unsolvable problem of nuclear wastes as well as nuclear weapons proliferation, makes nuclear energy incomprehensible. No matter what proponents of nuclear power may wish us to believe, nuclear energy is neither green nor is it a cheap alternative.

Over the last 50 years, the nuclear industry received a public subsidy of \$145 billion compared to \$5.49 billion dedicated to solar and wind power. In 2006, nuclear secured nearly half the government dollars dedicated to energy research and development. The Cheneys have a seat on the board of Exelon, our nation's biggest nuclear energy corporation.

The current budget presented to Congress cuts, by 25 percent, the allocation for the West Valley Demonstration Project, the federal portion of the West Valley nuclear site. Those who pay attention see this as another signal that the Department of Energy wants to leave New Yorkers with responsibility for the nuclear wastes. Why should state government be responsible for an \$8 billion or more cleanup of nuclear wastes in Western New York?

According to a report in the Weapons Complex Monitor on Feb. 12, the Department of Energy "explains the proposed cut as resulting from reduced costs to prepare a planned long-term stewardship Environmental Impact Statement . . ." The report quotes James Rispoli, assistant energy secretary for environmental management.

The Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes, environmentalists, the Citizen Task Force and NYSERDA have long complained that a long-term stewardship plan is absent. The environmental impact statement process for West Valley, which began in 1985-1986, is the longest unresolved statement in the history of the United States.

In a letter to the Springville Journal on Feb. 15, NYSERDA President Peter Smith wrote, "We've been pushing DOE to sit down with our organization to hash out a preferred alternative . . . but DOE senior management has consistently refused. We wrote to DOE for their reaction to . . . an end-state proposal by the U.S. EPA . . . They gave neither a reaction nor support. Their lack of interest in developing an end-state plan, coupled with this proposed budget cut, clearly reflects their lack of commitment to future cleanup work . . . DOE seems more intent on running away . . . than in listening to the community."

NYSERDA, in a recently filed, detailed lawsuit against the Department of Energy, argues federal responsibility for the cleanup. The Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes, volunteers who have watch-dogged the site since the mid-1970s, has alleged in court that the Department of Energy acts unilaterally without regard for National Environmental Policy Act regulations.

Ten years ago, residents of Western New York knew the West Valley nuclear site was our number one environmental threat. It still is. With every passing day, the natural forces of erosion come closer to exposing the buried waste and releasing it in very dangerous amounts into our water supply. The site is vulnerable to earthquakes, which could cause similar catastrophic harm to our drinking water.

The West Valley nuclear site slipped off the public's radar from 1996 to 2001, when 600,000 gallons of High Level Wastes were vitrified, or solidified. This was a major accomplishment, but solidifying these wastes did not make the site less of a threat. That waste and more is still on site, just in different forms, and millions of cubic feet of other wastes remain in whatever is left of cardboard boxes and drums buried in unlined trenches.

The end-state or preferred alternative supported by the Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes and by NYSERDA is completely exhuming the wastes and storing them above ground where they can be monitored until we have a national storage site. But top-level energy officials loathe this option.

The EPA end-state plan, referred to by Peter Smith, calls for exhumation of tanks holding residual wastes and full cleanup of a major portion of the site. The tanks, containing residual radioactive sludge, are at the end of their life span and could fail any day, causing high-level radioactive wastes to leak. The Department of Energy prefers to declassify these tanks and leave them in place. If the department exhumes these tanks, it will set a precedent that other groups will latch onto, forcing it to exhume other radioactive waste tanks buried throughout this nation.

In 2006, State Sen. Catherine Young sponsored legislation appropriating \$54,000 for the Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes, in collaboration with Citizen's Environmental Coalition, Nuclear Information and Resource Service, and the Center for Health and Environmental Justice, to perform a Full Cost Accounting Study analyzing the environmental and economic costs of cleanup options for the site. This is the first time such a study is being done for a nuclear site. The study will be completed later this year, but it is probable that full exhumation of the wastes will create the most jobs, and be the least expensive, safest long-term alternative.

This year or next, the Department of Energy is scheduled to release for public comment another draft environmental impact statement for decontamination and decommissioning of the site. The only way to get this site fully cleaned, its threat to the Great Lakes watershed negated and the land returned to the Hamlet of West Valley and Town of Ashford for positive economic development will be to participate in deciding the outcome for our number one environmental threat - the nuclear site 35 miles southeast of Buffalo, off Route 219 on the way to Ellicottville.

In an ideal world, the wastes could be exhumed over the next 20 years. Given federal resistance, it will take 50, maybe 100 years to fully clean this site. The longer the wastes remain, the more dangerous it is for residents of Western New York. As frightening as the consequences of erosion and earthquakes are, it is just as frightening to learn what possible uses are proposed for land containing nuclear wastes.

A few years ago, a private company, with the support of local politicians, proposed using the site as a place to disassemble live munitions. A decade ago, New York proposed a nuclear incinerator on the site. Heat does not cause radioactivity to decompose. Nuclear wastes would have been released into the air. Local residents, supported by the Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes and other groups across the state, put a stop to this and other monstrous schemes for the site.

Over the next couple of years, we will have an opportunity to force the federal government's hand and clean a major nuclear site more fully than any other site has been cleaned. To succeed, we will have to be a unified force focused on applying pressure on the state and federal governments.

A major release of the radioactivity from the West Valley nuclear site would make much of Western New York uninhabitable. We should not underestimate the probability that the Department of Energy will do the least amount possible, and pull whatever tricks are necessary, to leave this waste in place and extricate itself from all responsibility for the site.

A successful effort on our part to fully clean the nuclear site would send forth the message that Western New York is no longer a state, national and international dumping ground. The question for us is: What future do we want for our region? If we want something other than a wasteland, alleviating environmental threats must be a sincere and dedicated priority.

Judith Einach is director of the Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes. The coalition can be contacted at [digitup@buffalo.com](mailto:digitup@buffalo.com) and [www.digitup.org](http://www.digitup.org).

# DOE says 2008 WVDP budget would be 'sufficient'

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By BRIAN ACKLEY  
*Journal Editor*

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The U.S. Department of Energy says a 2008 fiscal year budget proposal that trims spending at the West Valley Demonstration Project by more than \$20 million would still be "sufficient" to keep clean-up efforts moving forward at the site.

DOE Spokesperson Anne Wickham indicated that more than just "site maintenance" would be possible under the current 2008 budget plan which would scale back West Valley's overall federal spending from \$74 million to about \$55 million. The fiscal year starts Oct. 1.

Wickham said the DOE would continue what has been dubbed the "core team" process aimed at completing a draft decommissioning and long-term stewardship blue print which could be released for public comment sometime next year.

Key stakeholders are meeting this week in Albany in an attempt to hammer out details of a proposed interim end-state plan which has received generally favorable reviews from most of the different state and federal parties involved in the West Valley clean-up efforts.

Should sentiment continue to be strong for such an agreement, officials are privately hoping that will pave the way for additional funds to be funneled West Valley's way, at least enough to maintain the current spending level.

West Valley Nuclear Services Company has indicated that as many as 100 workers could be lost if the budget proposal stands as is, and that work at the facility would be reduced to just a maintenance function only.

Some of the current efforts at the site will mean more efficient operations in the future, the DOE noted.

Wickham said by the end of the 2007 fiscal year on September 30, the DOE will have decontaminated and demolished 19 buildings.

"We will see additional efficiencies through the use of rail transportation to safely ship waste off site," Wickham added.

In 2008, she indicated that the DOE would also be able to continue to provide adequate security, maintain ventilation for highly-contaminated cells, continue to pump and treat a contaminated ground water plume, continue safe interim storage of high-level waste canisters, decontaminate cells in the Main Plant Process Building and Vitrification Facility, ship low-level waste from the Main Plant Process Building decontamination and demolition, ship remaining legacy low-level waste, and continue processing high-activity waste through the Remote Handled Waste Facility.

The department is also expected to announce sometime in the next month or two who will be awarded a new four-year clean-up contract. WVNSCO, which has held the contract since 1980, is competing with two other bidders.

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# OLEAN TIMES HERALD

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03/09/2007

## State, county officials tour West Valley Demonstration Project

By RICK MILLER, Olean Times Herald

WEST VALLEY — State and county officials toured the West Valley Demonstration project Thursday as word came of a possible change in thinking on the part of the U.S. Department of Energy over the nuclear waste cleanup.

Among those touring the town of Ashford cleanup site were Cattaraugus County Undersheriff Timothy Whitcomb, county Environmental Health Director Eric Wohlers, Julie Sirianni of state Sen. Catharine M. Young's office and Michael Briskey of state Assemblyman Joseph Giglio's office.

Mr. Wohlers, Ms. Sirianni and Mr. Briskey are members of the West Valley Citizen's Task Force. Ms. Sirianni and Mr. Briskey were touring the site for the first time.

Representatives from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) briefed those attending and led the tours.

The state and federal governments are partners in the West Valley Demonstration Project cleanup, but they are at odds over the pace and extent of the cleanup. NYSERDA has filed suit in federal district court challenging the U.S. Department of Energy's long-term cleanup plans.

The federal budget for 2008 proposed by President Bush cuts the West Valley Demonstration Project by more than \$20 million. It was budgeted for \$79 million in the present year. The Department of Energy would like to see most of the cleanup at the site completed in 2010.

The Department of Energy has proposed to "rubble-ize" the process building where most of the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel was done between 1966 and 1972 when the Nuclear Fuel Services plant operated. Instead of removing the debris, the Department of Energy was considering leaving it in place and grouting, or cementing, it over.

The building now holds 275 stainless steel containers that are 10 feet tall, two feet in diameter and filled with glass made from highly radioactive liquid wastes. The canisters are waiting for the day when they can be shipped to a federal repository — possibly Yucca Mountain in Nevada.

In the past week, however, the Department of Energy has begun to suggest it is seriously considering decontaminating the building and removing the debris after it is torn down. That is a welcome development to NYSERDA officials, who note this will make it possible to dig up soil beneath the process building that is contaminated with radioactivity. Officials have said the radioactivity is spreading in a plume toward creeks that empty into Cattaraugus Creek and Lake Erie, the source of drinking water for millions of people.

State officials would like to see the radioactive plume addressed more aggressively by the Department of Energy because the further it spreads, the more costly the cleanup will be.

Currently, there is some pumping and filtering of radioactivity from groundwater within the plume, as well as other less successful methods to slow its spread.

There also is the issue of four underground steel tanks that once held radioactive liquids used in the original process. The tanks were used during the cleanup which has been ongoing since 1981 at a total cost of \$2.2 billion.

The Citizens Task Force, the Coalition on Nuclear Wastes at West Valley and NYSERDA officials have endorsed the removal of the tanks while the Department of Energy is considering filling them with grout or cement. The tanks contain highly radioactive residue.

Last year, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's New York regional director suggested it would be best for the tanks to be removed. "This is a state-owned facility," Tom Attridge of NYSERDA's West Valley staff told officials in a briefing. "The Department of Energy is here to do a job. We have different motivations. DOE's is to get the job done and get out. We're going to stay here forever. Our job is to see that things are cleaned up."

The Citizens Task Force, created by the Department of Energy to get local input on the cleanup, has argued West Valley is not a good spot for long-term storage, Mr. Attridge said.

More than 400,000 cubic feet of low-level waste has been shipped from the facility, with most going to a facility in Utah, said Sonja Allen of West Valley Nuclear Services, the prime contractor for the cleanup.

The process of solidifying highly radioactive liquid wastes resulted in nearly 20,000 drums of cement made with much of the radioactivity removed, she said.

The state-licensed disposal site for low-level nuclear waste is not addressed by the West Valley Demonstration Project, Mr. Attridge said during a tour of the site that included the black, plastic-covered, low-level disposal areas on the South Plateau. There are 14

trenches with low-level nuclear waste dating from 1963 to 1975.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation prohibited further waste disposal after trenches overflowed with water contaminated with radioactivity in 1975. The massive tarps keep water from further infiltrating the site, which is also threatened by erosion.

“These are all different kinds of facilities that need to be managed,” Mr. Attridge said as the tour was ending. “They are all actively managed and safe right now. We need to decide how to manage them in the future.”

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# MONITOR

WEAPONS COMPLEX

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Waste Management ♦ Clean Up

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## **DOE: WEST VALLEY FY08 REQUEST ADEQUATE TO CONTINUE CLEANUP WORK**

The Department of Energy's budget request for Fiscal Year 2008 contains adequate funding to carry out planned cleanup work at the West Valley Demonstration Project, Cynthia Anderson, director of the DOE Office of Site Support and Small Projects, said last week. DOE has come under fire for proposing a sharp cut in cleanup funds for West Valley next year—from \$73.4 million in the Administration's FY07 budget request to \$54 million. The Energy Dept. has defended the proposed funding reduction by citing the completion of some site facility demolition work and a reduction in off-site waste shipments, as well as a still-undetermined final end-state for the site. The site's current cleanup contractor, West Valley Nuclear Services Company, has warned, though, that such a cut would result in most work having to come to a halt, with about 30 percent of the company's staff of approximately 300 people at risk for layoffs (*WC Monitor*, Vol. 18 No. 9).

At a March 8 House Cleanup Caucus briefing on West Valley and DOE's 'small sites,' Anderson defended DOE's proposed FY08 budget, saying it would allow the Department to continue to move forward on the West Valley cleanup. "The only low funding is '08, and even with that we believe we can get work done," she said. Among the various projects the Energy Dept. plans to complete at the upstate New York site in FY 2008 is shipping a remaining stock of about 600 cubic meters of legacy low-level waste off-site for disposal; shipping lowlevel waste resultant from D&D activities at the site's Main Process Building and decontaminating 14 hot cells in the Main Process Plant Building and two cells in the site's closed vitrification facility. In addition, the Energy Dept. plans to complete next year a draft decommissioning Environmental Impact Statement, which has been in the works for a number of years, Anderson said. To date, DOE's accomplishments at the site include having shipped approximately 80,000 cubic feet of low-level waste off-site for disposal and conducting D&D activities on 17 out of 39 targeted excess facilities, Anderson said. "If people say nothing's going on at West Valley, we have drum cell waste that we're shipping every day and we have facilities we're D&Ding at West Valley," she added. ■

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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March 13, 2007

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## **SCHUMER CALLS ON FEDS TO APPROVE “WAY FORWARD” FOR WEST VALLEY – FIGHTS TO RESTORE ADMINISTRATION BUDGET CUTS**

*New Joint Federal-State Plan Offers the Best Course to Clean Up West Valley  
and Finally Make the Area Safe*

*Earlier this Year, Administration Proposed Slashing Funding for the  
Demonstration Project by Nearly 30 Percent*

*Schumer, author of the West Valley Remediation Act, Says the New Plan Has  
Concrete Steps to Clean Up the Site Once and For All*

Today, U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer called on the federal agencies responsible for the clean-up at the old West Valley Nuclear facility to approve the so-called way forward to clean up the toxic site once and for all. Schumer said the new plan, devised by the Department of Energy in conjunction with state and local officials, offers concrete steps to clear areas now, rather than letting the entire site languish until a full plan is devised. Schumer also said he will fight to reverse the potentially disastrous 30 percent funding cut to the West Valley Demonstration Project included in the Administration's Fiscal Year 2008 budget.

"This plan offers the best bet to clean up West Valley once and for all," Schumer said. "For far too long the Energy Department has dragged its feet and ducked its responsibility. Now we have a reasonable and achievable plan to remove this terrible blight from Western New York. I look forward to working with the Energy Department and our state, local, and community partners to help implement this important plan and will hold the feds' feet to the fire to make sure this clean

up happens in a timely and efficient manner.”

Schumer today announced his support for Energy Department’s phased plan to clean up the West Valley Nuclear site. Under the plan, officials would continue to monitor the plume and aggressively develop accurate models of its migration so that the best course of action with regard to clean-up can be determined. Overall, the Energy Department would remove toxic buildings and earth that are able to be moved right now, and while those operations are underway, a new proposal would be devised to clean up the entire site.

Schumer said this phased approach is best way forward because it allows the DOE to make progress on some of the smaller issues without waiting to resolve the trickier problems associated with cleaning up years of accumulated toxic and radioactive waste. “Any high-schooler studying for the SAT will tell you the smart way to tackle a test is to answer the easy questions first, then circle back to tackle the more difficult ones,” said Schumer.

Schumer also blasted the Administration’s budget cuts to the West Valley Demonstration project saying that, with this new progress and plan, the cuts couldn’t come at a worse time. The Administration’s FY 2008 proposed shrinking the budget for the project by nearly 30 percent, from \$75 million in FY 2007 to just \$54 million for next year. The budget for the project has been repeatedly cut from \$100 million just a few years ago.

Schumer today wrote to the Chairman Kent Conrad (D-ND) and Ranking Member Judd Gregg (R-NH) asking them to restore funding to the full \$100 million level in the Congressional budget set to be released next month.

The West Valley Demonstration Project was established by Congress in 1980 to safely solidify high-level radioactive liquid wastes that were stored at the West Valley site. The site is the former location of the only commercial nuclear fuel reprocessing facility to ever operate in the United States and between 1966 and 1972, the reprocessed spent nuclear fuel to extract reusable uranium and plutonium and the high-level radioactive liquid waste, a by-product of the chemical dissolution process, was stored in underground tanks at the site.

# THE BUFFALO NEWS

## WEST VALLEY

### **Schumer urges agencies to approve cleanup plan**

**Updated: 03/14/07 6:38 AM**

The federal agencies responsible for cleaning up the former West Valley nuclear fuel reprocessing center should approve a recently revealed plan to revive the stalled effort, Sen. Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y., said Tuesday.

“This plan offers the best bet to clean up West Valley once and for all,” Schumer said in a release issued by his office.

The plan would concentrate on cleanup efforts that are achievable, including decontaminating and demolishing the old process building, while putting larger issues, such as who is responsible in the future for the Cattaraugus County site, on the back burner.

Schumer also called on the Bush administration not to cut funding for the cleanup. The administration’s proposed budget for West Valley in fiscal year 2008 is 30 percent less than 2007.

# Schumer adds voice to WV plan, budget fight

Add U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer to the voices now calling on the federal agencies responsible for the cleanup at the old West Valley Nuclear facility to approve the so-called way forward to clean up the toxic site once and for all.

Schumer said the plan, devised by the Department of Energy in conjunction with state and local officials, offers concrete steps to clear areas now, rather than letting the entire site languish until a full plan is devised.

He also said he will fight to reverse the potentially disastrous 30 percent funding cut to the West Valley Demonstration Project included in the Bush administration's fiscal year 2008 budget.

"This plan offers the best bet to clean up West Valley once and for all," Schumer said. "For far too long the Energy Department has dragged its feet and ducked its responsibility. Now we have a reasonable and achievable plan to remove this terrible blight from Western New York. I look forward to working with the Energy Department and our state, local and community partners to help implement this important plan and will hold the feds' feet to the fire to make sure this clean up happens in a timely and efficient manner."

In adding his voice to the new clean up plan, Schumer indicated federal officials would continue to monitor a contaminated groundwater plume and aggressively

develop accurate models of its migration so that the best course of action with regard to cleanup can be determined.

Overall, the Energy Department would remove toxic buildings and earth that are able to be moved right now, and while those operations are underway, a new proposal would be devised to clean up the entire site.

Schumer said this phased approach is best way forward because it allows the DOE to make progress on some of the smaller issues without waiting to resolve the trickier problems associated with cleaning up years of accumulated toxic and radioactive waste.

"Any high-schooler studying for the SAT will tell you the smart way to tackle a test is to answer the easy questions first, then circle back to tackle the more difficult ones," said Schumer.

Schumer also blasted the administration's budget cuts to the West Valley Demonstration project saying that with this new progress and plan, the cuts couldn't come at a worse time. The Administration's

FY 2008 proposed shrinking the budget for the project by nearly 30 percent, from \$75 million in FY 2007 to just \$54 million for next year. The budget for the project has been repeatedly cut from \$100 million just a few years ago.

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**WASHINGTON, D.C.**

## **Kuhl asks House panel for West Valley funds**

**Updated: 03/22/07 7:06 AM**

WASHINGTON — Rep. John R. “Randy” Kuhl Jr., R-Hammondsport, is asking the House Appropriations Committee to return the West Valley Demonstration Project in Cattaraugus County to a \$110 million funding level.

In recent years, the project has seen funds diminish and is targeted for \$54 million in 2008, on the heels of a \$75 million appropriation for 2007.

“The federal government needs to step up and clean this site now, not 10 or 20 years from now,” said Kuhl, who pointed to progress by the Environmental Protection Agency and Gov. Eliot L. Spitzer toward accelerating cleanup plans.

“An increase in the budget would accelerate cleanup at a critical time in West Valley,” he wrote in a letter to House Appropriations Committee Chairman Pete Visclosky, D-Ind., and ranking member David Hobson, R-Ohio. “There is a growing radioactive plume on the northern plateau of the property that, if left untouched, could spread into the ground water system — that ultimately leads to Lake Erie and the Great Lakes.”

# State wants federal help to expedite contaminated WVDP groundwater cleanup

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By BRIAN ACKLEY  
*Journal Editor*

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Groundwater below the West Valley Demonstration Project that is 18,000 times more contaminated than guidelines allow needs more urgent attention from the federal government, at least according to New York state.

In a March 6 letter to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the state group responsible for monitoring cleanup efforts at site claims that concentrations of strontium-90 now extends approximately 500 meters north and east of the site's Main Plant Process Building.

The New York State Energy and Research and Development Authority, which last fall filed a lawsuit over the slow pace of cleanup at the site, says they have "significant concerns" about the groundwater plume, and that the contamination is also present in surface water on the WVDP premises.

Officials say that if access to the site were not restricted, the contamination would "pose a threat to public health and safety."

NYSERDA said the sr-90 release is contaminating surface water by seeping into low-lying ditches within the WVDP property.

In a letter to the NRC from NY-SERDA President Peter R. Smith, he indicated the federal commission has already established precedent in responding to unplanned releases of radioactive material at

other NRC-licensed sites.

"The NRC response to the unintended release of radioactive material shows that the NRC considers (it) to be a serious matter that must be addressed promptly and properly," Smith noted. "As such, we are perplexed by the NRC's low level of involvement in the groundwater contamination issue at West Valley."

He also added that, "the high degree of public concern and lack of trust that resulted from inadvertent releases at nuclear power plants also is present, and increasing, at West Valley."

The letter agreed that the NRC determined that inadvertent releases "had essentially no off-site dose consequences," but that it recognized that such incidents "can result in a high level of concern from the public, a high level of attention from the news media and elected officials, increased decommissioning costs and a lack of trust in the information provided by the NRC and the site operator."

State officials believe two radioactive substances leaked into the water table at the site decades ago. The strontium is more of concern than Cs-137, the other identified contaminant, because it migrates at a much higher rate.

According to NYSERDA, the plume contamination is as high as 150,000 picocuries per liter. The Environmental Protection Agency drinking water maximum contami-

## *State wants help with WVDP water cleanup...*

(Continued from Page 1)

nant level is eight.

The state believes it is the federal government's responsibility to deal with the issue, although the Department of Environmental Conservation has said in the recent past that in fact the responsibility to control or limit the plume's spread would fall back on the state.

The DOE has tried twice to mitigate the plume, including three groundwater extraction wells which the state says captures only a "small portion" of the spreading contamination. It is estimated that in the last decade, the amount of contaminated soil has risen from four million cubic feet in 1995 to some 28 million cubic feet by 2005.

NYSERDA is also concerned that the inattention is adding to the eventual cost of decommissioning the site, and that exhumation and disposal of contaminated soil from the plume could add as much as \$1 billion to the site's final clean-up price tag.

"Since the DOE appears unwilling to take further voluntary action to stop the plume from spreading, there is a pressing need for NRC to actively engage DOE in identifying and implementing additional measures to stop the plume from expanding farther into uncontaminated and uncontrolled areas of this site," Smith added.

(Continued on Page 7)