

CTF to NRC draft c            October 17, 2006... Lee

The Citizen Task Force (CTF) for the West Valley site is very concerned about the continued spread of the radioactive plume of strontium 90 across the North Plateau of the site

As you know, the CTF was formed over nine years ago to advise federal and state site managers for the West Valley Demonstration Project (WVDP). Through the years we have studied the various waste management areas on the site, often questioning decisions and actions, sometimes becoming frustrated by what appeared to be indecision and inaction. Once more we are mystified by official inaction.

In order for the Department of Energy (DOE) to take control of operations at the site, implementing the WVDP Act, ~~your agency~~ NRC suspended the license for the site then held by New York State Energy and Research Authority (NYSERDA). The justification for that decision (putting the license in abeyance) was that DOE held the expertise for dealing with radioactive waste, and therefore could be depended on to handle it with the health and safety of the population as a top priority.

As we understand it, NRC is responsible for the health and safety of the populace regarding radiological matters. Even though you normally exercise this duty in the context of licenses, we believe you have a broader, more general national duty to protect citizens -from radiological exposure-

According to monitoring reports from your office to DOE, a radioactive plume of strontium 90 (Sr-90) in the groundwater was apparently discovered at the site as early as 1990. By 1995 the source was determined to be a spill in the old Process Building. The most recent NRC monitoring report verifies that the spill occurred in 1967. Numerous monitoring visits to the site by NRC officials — documented mitigation efforts by DOE to slow the progress of the plume, including a “pump and treat” system, and a Permeable Treatment Wall to capture the radioactive waste. Neither system has worked satisfactorily. Parts of the plume have gone around the wells and the wall, and have by-passed treatment entirely.

Contaminated water is still daily spreading to previously uncontaminated media, migrating and expanding in the sand and gravel of the North Plateau. The underground portion is moving rapidly beyond the WVDP project premises controlled by DOE into the uncontaminated buffer area of the West Valley Nuclear Services Center. Contaminated groundwater seeps into surface ditches and also discharges into the buffer area, as the plume migrates toward the Great Lakes watershed. In addition, when this plume leaves the DOE-controlled portion of the site, Sr-90 concentrations exceed

DOE's own derived concentration guidelines, as well as federal and state regulated limits.

We find ourselves between the proverbial rock and a hard place. We are mystified by the apparent lack of governmental intervention in the interest of the health and safety of the people. DOE says it's not their job because it happened before they got here and they don't own the property. NYSERDA says it's not their job because DOE has control of that acreage and controls the source as part of the Demonstration Project. In numerous monitoring reports to DOE your agency stated that DOE and its contractor had "established and maintained controls, processes and programs adequate to protect public health and safety." Apparently those statements were made in error.

The CTF assumes that NRC's guidance relationship with DOE precludes action to force compliance with laws and regulations meant to protect the public from harm. NRC apparently takes an advisory role, but who else can we turn to? We hope your responsibility includes more than watching, waiting and advising. NRC's national commitment to protect the health and safety of the populace radiologically should allow room for so