

Olean Times Herald  
Tuesday, May 5, 2009

## West Valley Demonstration Project meeting tonight

ASHFORD HOLLOW – Tonight's meeting of the U.S. Department of Energy and New York State Energy Research and Development Authority on the proposed Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the cleanup at the West Valley

Demonstration Project is the last before the June 8 statement comment deadline.

The quarterly meeting is set for 6:30 p.m. at the Ashford Office Complex on Route 219.

Joanne Hameister, president of the Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes, said, "This (statement) very

well might be the last opportunity we have to address the future of West Valley."

# Ashford learns \$74 million will help speed cleanup of WVDP

By RENEE HANLEY  
Journal Correspondent

NYSERDA (New York State Energy Research and Development Authority) Program Director, Paul Bembia, updated the Ashford Town Board on the progress being made toward cleanup of the West Valley site during the town council's monthly meeting on April 8.

Bembia explained that the site had received \$74 million as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The money will be spent toward cleanup as a whole along with other ongoing projects.

"From NYSERDA's perspective, we are very pleased that the Department of Energy (DOE) recognized the excellent work that is going on here and the value of putting additional money into accelerating the cleanup," said Bembia.

He also reminded those present that comments regarding the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) are being accepted until June 8 and encouraged concerned citizens to voice their opinions regarding the nuclear waste site to the DOE.

Bembia also wanted to inform the board as to the status of a bulk storage warehouse and acreage on Buttermilk Road that is slated for eventual release from the site and would be eligible for unrestricted use.

"The DOE has made a contractor available to us and they're preparing what's called a 'final status survey plan,' where we have to go through and do detailed sampling, inside and outside the building, to make sure everything is safe," Bembia explained.

When that process is completed, the property will be released to NYSERDA, who will implement

further testing, prepare a report and formally request the property be released from the NRC license.

The entire process could take up to 18 months. NYSERDA is also hoping to request an additional unimpacted 100-acre plot be released, which would entail a simpler process.

"Normally, they would do [release] the entire property all at once, under the process of license termination, but because of the complexity of the demonstration project cleanup we wanted to see if there are ways to release some of that property without waiting for everything to be done all at one time," Bembia explained.

He also noted that there may be a need for further scientific studies regarding the erosion processes on the site.

Currently, there is erosion monitoring and control work being conducted, along with professional examination of small scale models.

In conclusion, Bembia assured the board that, from NYSERDA's perspective, "We're committed to take care of this site, to safely manage this facility."

In other news:

- Cattaraugus County Legislator Charles Hebdon was present at the meeting to discuss various assessment rates throughout the district.

"We are working very hard to find a way that we can get all the towns brought up to 100 percent assessment," Hebdon said. "We are going to have meetings with the assessors and supervisors to try to get to the bottom of it. Within the next few years, if we don't do something, the state will step in and tell us how to do it," he added. Cattaraugus County valuation rates range from three

## Ashford Board...

(Continued from Page 1)

to 100 percent.

- In regard to wind energy, Hebdon felt that "The landowner should get the big chunk of the money, and then the town."

- The town received three bids for a roller. As some of the bids did not include enough information regarding the equipment, the purchasing decision will be postponed to a later date.

- Trash pickup is scheduled for May 4 and 5. Tire pickup will be held on May 9 at the town barn. Residents are encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities to rid their properties of rubbish and debris.

- There is a problem updating Ashford's information to an online county database due to computer incompatibility.

The next Ashford Town Board meeting is May 13, 7:30 p.m. at the Community Center in West Valley.

# Lawmakers consider DOE's preferred plan for West Valley

By Rick Miller  
Olean Times Herald

LITTLE VALLEY - Cattaraugus County lawmakers are expected to vote later this month on a resolution endorsing the U.S. Department of Energy's preferred alternative for cleanup and long-term monitoring at the West Valley Demonstration Project.

After presentations by federal and state officials Wednesday and discussions with the county's representative to the West Valley Citizens Task Force, members of the legislature's Development and Agriculture Committee agreed to support the Department of Energy's "phased decision-making" alternative.

The approach, a \$1.1 billion proposal that addresses major cleanup concerns, but defers decisions on removal of underground tanks containing radioactive residue and state and federal burial grounds containing low-level and high-level radioactive wastes, is a step back from the total cleanup the County Legislature sought five years ago.

Three years ago, New York state filed a lawsuit against the Department of Energy in a bid to force a wider cleanup than the department proposed at the time.

On June 23, 2004, county legislators were unanimous in their support for the Citizens Task Force position that the site is not suitable for permanent disposal of radioactive waste and calling for a cleanup that would allow unrestricted use of the property.

Last month, the Seneca Nation of Indians approved a resolution supporting the total clean-up of the site at an estimated cost of \$9.7 billion that would take as long as 64 years.

County lawmakers are racing against a June 8 deadline for comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the decommissioning and long-term monitoring of the 175-acre site in the town of Ashford managed by the U.S. Department of Energy.

Eric Wohlers, the county health department's director of environmental health, and a member of the West Valley Citizens Task Force, said the

task force has not yet agreed on a final statement on which of the four cleanup alternatives its members favor. They will decide between the preferred phased-decision-making alternative and a full cleanup, he said.

Mr. Wohlers told members of the Development and Agriculture Committee that while the phased-decision-making alternative addresses the most immediate concerns, the task force would prefer some guarantees that the burial grounds would not be left there forever with the danger of their contents contaminating Lake Erie.

He said that while he would prefer a sitewide cleanup, he added that there were also grave concerns that workers would be exposed to radiation if the burial grounds are dug up and the waste shipped off-site.

There is no disposal site for some of the radioactive waste at West Valley, a former spent nuclear-fuel reprocessing plant that operated in the 1960s and early 1970s. A new storage facility will have to be built for 275 glass logs containing what was once highly radioactive liquid waste so

the Main Process Building they are now stored in can be demolished to get at the sources of a plume of radioactivity moving through the soil.

The Department of Energy has previously proposed filling the 600,000-gallon steel tanks with concrete, while others, including members of the Coalition on West Valley Nuclear wastes would rather see them removed. The burial grounds, which are covered by a thick membrane and surrounded by slurry walls designed to keep water out, would also continue to be managed by state and federal officials. There are concerns that future erosion could cut into the burial areas.

County Legislator Jerry E. Burrell, R-Franklinville, chairman of the Development and Agriculture Committee, suggested that since the phased-decision-making alternative addressed the most immediate concerns, it should be considered by the County Legislature.

Most committee member agreed. The resolution is expected to be voted on at the Legislature's May 28 meeting, he said.

## Lawmakers to decide on West Valley wastes

By Kathy Kellogg  
CATTARAUGUS CORRESPONDENT

LITTLE VALLEY — Cattaraugus County lawmakers will decide by June 8 whether to pass legislation supporting complete removal of all wastes from the former nuclear fuels reprocessing plant in West Valley.

In 2000 and 2004, county lawmakers adopted resolutions supporting the position that the 3,300-acre site should be released from federal control in a condition that will allow unrestricted uses of the land and that all wastes lacking a final repository should be stored in an above-ground retrievable condition until a safe disposal is possible.

They supported the conclusions of the West Valley Citizen Task Force, an advisory committee formed by the state that has been meeting since 1997 to develop recommendations for site cleanup.

County Attorney Dennis Tobolski said he would draft a resolution incorporating the arguments of members of the Development and Agriculture Committee, who debated Wednesday whether to include a statement that a burial site for the waste doesn't exist.

The committee meeting followed presentations from state and federal officials on the four cleanup alternatives contained in the revised study:

- Complete removal of all radioactive waste costing about \$9.7 billion, and taking 260 employees over 64 years.
- Sitewide close-in-place costing about \$1.1 billion, taking 360 workers over seven years.
- Preferred by the state and federal governments and known as “phased decisionmaking,” costing an unknown amount, but in the first phase of eight years costing an estimated \$1.2 billion with 230 employees, and further studies, implementation of as-yet undiscovered technology in Phase II.
- And the unlikely “do-nothing” no-action alternative for perpetual monitoring, maintenance and funding.

While supporting phased decisionmaking, the State Environmental Research and Development Authority has called into question many of the study's erosion modeling conclusions, the analysis of groundwater transport of contamination and the ability to predict fractures and soil permeability, along with costs and other factors.

The Seneca Nation of Indians, mindful of the impacts on future generations and downstream residents, has called for complete removal of the wastes at the site, as have other groups.

## ► Cattaraugus County

# Legislature to vote on West Valley resolution

By Rick Miller  
Olean Times Herald

**LITTLE VALLEY —** Cattaraugus County lawmakers are expected to vote Wednesday on a resolution supporting the U.S. Department of Energy's preferred alternative for cleanup and long-term monitoring of the West Valley Demonstration Project.

The phased-decision-making alternative, which would address the most serious concerns at the town of Ashford cleanup site, while deferring a final choice on removal of underground tanks and waste burial grounds for up to 30 years.

A sitewide removal of all facilities and state and federal low-level radioactive wastes would take more than 60 years and cost nearly \$10 billion, while the phased-decision-making option would take seven years at a cost of about \$1.2 billion. Federal and state officials would continue investigating what to do with the tanks and burial areas for as many as 30 years before making a decision.

County Legislator Jerry E. Burrell, R-Franklinville, chairman of the Development and Agriculture Committee, said Monday that county lawmakers who listened to a presentation last week on the cleanup options seemed to prefer the phased-decision-making alternative because it continues the cleanup.

Development and Agriculture Committee members heard from Eric Wohlers, director of the Cattaraugus County Health Department's Environmental Health unit and a member of the West Valley Citizens Task Force.

"The bottom line is that we'd like it to have it gone yesterday," Mr. Burrell said. "In all honesty, though, there's no place to put it (highly radioactive waste). You want it done in a safe and responsible way. You don't want to expose workers or residents in the area."

The first phase of the cleanup can be done safely, but removing twin 600,000-

gallon steel tanks containing radioactive residue, or digging up and removing the waste disposal areas that cover several acres of the site could expose workers and area residents if not done properly. Much of the work would be expected to be done robotically.

Still, there is no federal repository for the 275 highly radioactive glass logs that are stored in a shielded area of the Main Process Building. They will have to be moved to a building yet to be built before the Main Process Building can be decontaminated and demolished. A plume of radioactivity has seeped from beneath the building. That source will be removed after the building is removed.

Mr. Burrell said legislators seem to want the rest of the radioactive waste removed from the site as well, but want it done in a safe manner.

Mr. Burrell said the resolution will probably be voted

on Wednesday rather than send a resolution supporting the phased decision-making to committees next week.

"We've already discussed it," he said. "I think we have a consensus. Why send it to committee?"

(Contact reporter Rick Miller at [rmiller@oleantimesherald.com](mailto:rmiller@oleantimesherald.com))

# THE BUFFALO NEWS



FILE- In this June 25, 2002 file photo, a media group tours the peak of the proposed Yucca Mountain nuclear waste dump near Mercury, Nev. In February, Congress allocated \$288 million for the development of the site legally designated to hold the nation's radioactive waste. That was about \$100 million less than what the Bush administration requested, but still enough for a staff of several hundred people to continue work.

AP Photo

Updated: 05/14/09 04:17 AM

## Dead or alive? Yucca Mountain still gets funding

By KATHLEEN HENNESSEY  
Associated Press Writer

These days, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid prefers nothing so much as a one-word description for the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository long planned for his state: dead.

And President Barack Obama has made clear he is looking elsewhere to solve the nation's nuclear waste problem.

But that doesn't mean people aren't still paying for it. Sometimes not even a president with the Senate majority leader at his back can easily kill a project 25 years and \$13.5 billion in the making. Not quickly or cheaply, anyway.

In February, Congress allocated \$288 million for the development of the site legally designated to hold the nation's radioactive waste. That was about \$100 million less than what the Bush administration requested, but still enough for a staff of several hundred people to continue work.

Last week, President Barack Obama proposed \$196.8 million in 2010 funding for Yucca Mountain, an all-time low.

The money flows despite Energy Secretary Steven Chu's recent declaration that the desert mountain 90 miles from Las Vegas is no longer considered an option for radioactive waste storage. Obama's proposed budget repeats the assertion, making good on an oft-repeated campaign promise to swing-state Nevada.

Experts say Yucca Mountain hasn't disappeared from the budget for reasons both practical and political.

Neither Reid nor the president has tried to hammer the nail in the coffin. Neither is pushing for a change to the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, the bill that as amended in 1987 requires the government to store spent fuel from nuclear power plants under an ancient volcanic ridge called Yucca Mountain.

Reid's office said the first step is finding another home for the radioactive waste.

"The law will eventually have to be changed to completely kill Yucca," Reid spokesman Jon Summers said. "However there's no rush to do so until we have an alternative plan for dealing with nuclear waste in place."

To that end, Reid and Chu have announced a commission to study nuclear waste storage alternatives and make recommendations to the Energy Department - as long as those recommendations don't include Yucca Mountain.

While the Obama administration has proposed a dramatic cut in the project's budget, it also plans to continue the process of licensing the underground storage site. The proposed budget actually increased funding for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which can take up to four years deliberating on the license application.

On Wednesday, Yucca Mountain supporters were dealt a blow when it was announced that Gregory B. Jaczko, a close Reid ally, was in line to chair the commission.

Still, the decision to continue with the licensing leaves the door open for a future administration - perhaps one facing different political realities - to revive the site.

Chu explained that he believes there is scientific value in continuing to attempt to license the site, even though the administration's policy is that it will never be used.

Asked to explain, Energy Department spokeswoman Stephanie Mueller said only that the process "and other important issues need to be resolved thoughtfully, carefully and comprehensively as we develop a responsible long-term approach to nuclear waste management."

Industry groups, however, suggest there could be legal ramifications if the application is withdrawn.

"Yucca Mountain is still the law of the land," said John Keeley, spokesman for the Nuclear Energy Institute. "We can't speculate on what would happen if the administration were to suddenly pull the license application, but it seems to me that their not doing so is on some level recognition that there would be dire consequences, dire liability consequences."

Federal courts already have found the Energy Department in breach of contract for not taking ownership of the spent fuel now being stored at nuclear reactors, as dictated by law. Those courts have awarded close to \$1 billion to utilities, and future liabilities could top \$11 billion, according to industry figures.

Kelley said his group supports the new commission and he conceded the rush to find a new home for waste isn't a race against time.

"The good news here is we're not in any emergency or crisis situation because our 104 reactor sites across the country have safely and securely managed fuel on site," he said. "The fuel can stay there for 100 years."

With the urgency removed from the process, it's possible Yucca Mountain could linger for years as a budget line item while alternatives are developed and the political will to change the law is mustered.

Yucca Mountain wouldn't be the first aborted government project to drain federal funding long after its "death." It might not even rank among the most expensive projects on the scrap heap.

In 1993, a year after Congress killed the superconducting super collider in Texas, the government spent \$640 million not building it.

The federal budget allocation isn't the only money being spent on the dying Yucca Mountain project. As long as the project remains on the books, the state of Nevada will pay to fight it, along with environment groups and Indian tribes - with lawyers working on both sides.

"As long as this thing limps along, it'll cost everybody money," Loux said.



Posted on Sun, May. 17, 2009

Monday, May 18, 2009

# Corbett: No new nuclear waste for South Carolina

By SUSAN CORBETT  
Guest Columnist

With the failure of the nation's nuclear spent fuel repository at Yucca Mountain to open and \$1.6 billion in federal stimulus funds in the offing, some legislative officials are offering up our state to become the nation's dumping ground for the more than 55,000 tons of deadly radioactive waste generated by nuclear reactors, even suggesting a revival of the reprocessing debacle.

Nuclear reprocessing produces the sort of high-level waste that is sitting in leaking tanks at the Savannah River Site, considered by many, even DHEC, to be the most significant environmental hazard threatening South Carolina.

Why are some of our legislators actively pursuing what many consider the most risky, dirty and dangerous nuclear activity? U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham and Reps. James Clyburn and Joe Wilson are openly calling for reprocessing, although they admit our state has a dismal record of ever getting rid of any radioactive waste dumped here. Reprocessing would mean the whole nation would transport its high-level waste to our state. We would become Yucca Mountain.

Reprocessing is not a final solution. In a process that chops up the spent fuel rods and dissolves them in a witches brew of nitric acids, it creates large amounts of high-level radioactive waste and a low-level radioactive liquid waste stream. It also separates out and creates stockpiles of plutonium and uranium that will take generations, if not centuries, for disposition. Worldwide reprocessing has resulted in tons of unused plutonium, creating a monstrous proliferation risk.

Reprocessing does not negate the need for a geologic repository, unless we agree to let the waste stay here forever, in an environment completely unsuited for long-term storage. Gov. Dick Riley once said the first law of radioactive waste is it tends to stay where it is dumped. That certainly has been the case in South Carolina.

Reprocessing is very expensive. The Japanese have spent \$20 billion (triple the original projection) trying to start up a reprocessing facility at Rokkasho. Early projections for a U.S. reprocessing facility top \$25 billion. Isn't the nuclear industry subsidized enough by taxpayers through loan guarantees, Construction Work in Progress laws and the Price-Anderson Act, without adding this to the bill?

Reprocessing sites in Sellafield, England, and West Valley, N.Y., are some of the most contaminated places in the world, where deadly radioactive nuclides have migrated offsite into water tables, air and soil. Guess who's paying for the attempts to clean up these toxic sites? Taxpayers, of course.



Reprocessing spent fuel is too expensive, too dirty and completely unnecessary. The better way to handle spent fuel is to store it on site at reactors in a safe, economical method known as hardened onsite storage, and wait for another, more geologically suitable repository to be sited. While this does shift the burden of monitoring nuclear waste to the location where it was made, there is some justice in this: The community that benefited from the construction of the plant and utilized the power it generated also shares in the burden and responsibility of its waste, instead of dumping it on someone who received no benefit.


We have become the Dump It In Dixie state. Everything, from municipal garbage to corporate hog farms to deadly radioactive waste from all over the world has found a safe, cheap, environmentally lax haven here. In the national game of radioactive waste hot potato, we always seem to be left holding the toxic spud.

Shame on Wilson, Clyburn, Graham and other elected officials for trading dollars for dumping, in any way, shape or form. Citizens need to call their elected officials and tell them we don't want to be Yucca Mountain. Tell them to take the clean-up stimulus money and really clean up the Savannah River Site. Don't make or take any more radioactive waste that will remain forever in our state.

Ms. Corbett, of West Columbia, chairs the S.C. chapter of the Sierra Club.

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05/15/09 07:00 AM

## CATTARAUGUS COUNTY LEGISLATURE

# Full West Valley cleanup is urged

By Kathy Kellogg

CATTARAUGUS CORRESPONDENT

LITTLE VALLEY—The Cattaraugus County Legislature acknowledged that there is no final repository for the most dangerous radioactive wastes at the West Valley Demonstration Project, but Wednesday voted unanimously to join the Seneca Nation of Indians, the West Valley Coalition and the Concerned Citizens of Cattaraugus County and several nationally recognized environmental groups in calling for a complete cleanup of the former nuclear fuels reprocessing center.

The Legislature will submit the resolution to the U. S. Department of Energy (DOE) and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) for a June 8 comment deadline in the DOE's Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Decommissioning and/or Long-Term Stewardship of the project site.

Jim Snyder, R-Olean, pointed out that the resolution is significant because it will define the Legislature's awareness of the issue. It was also praised by Norman L. Marsh, R-Little Valley, who in last week's committee discussion labeled as "wishy-washy" a proposal to support both the full and phased cleanup options. He noted that the wastes are located near the Route 219 expressway project.

Lois Zendarski of Concerned Citizens of Cattaraugus County asked the legislators to support a less costly full cleanup based on the conclusions of a full cost-accounting study, while partial cleanup could risk the health of the fisheries in Cattaraugus Creek, Lake Erie and Lake Ontario.

Eric Wohlers, the county's environmental health director who has represented the county for more than 10 years on the West Valley Citizen Task Force advisory group serving NYSERDA and DOE, said the two agencies have the safety and health of area residents in mind but still disagree on erosion predictions affecting wastes stored at the site.

“I am 100 percent in favor of total cleanup, and I would like to go on record. Everybody in West Valley and in Ashford would like it, too,” said Charles F. Hebdon, D-West Valley, who added that state authorities told residents the facility “would be good for us” when the processing plant was built in the 1960s just three miles from his home.

As the comment deadline approaches, the citizens’ group is still debating support for one of two cleanup alternatives.

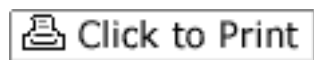
The full cleanup alternative is projected to take 260 employees more than 64 years at a projected \$9.7 billion. The phased decision-making approach would take eight years to remove a number of contaminated buildings and hot spots at a cost of about \$1.2 billion using 230 employees. The second phase could take up to 30 years to find new technology to remove buried high-level waste tanks and other highly contaminated areas for a cost yet to be determined.

The resolution notes two of the Legislature’s concerns about full cleanup — namely, that the 64-year time frame is based on the current funding rate and could mean increased radiation exposure for workers. The resolution asks instead for a shortened 10-year completion and increased use of robotic devices to reduce exposure.

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## MY VIEW

### Tim Klahn: Route 219 expansion has been mishandled

Updated: 05/15/09 10:47 AM

As the owner of a small family farm in the path of Route 219, I find the recent push to extend the road disturbing. It's hard enough trying to survive these days with record-low milk prices. But the constant drumbeat from politicians is even more disheartening —especially when they don't seem to know what the facts are or how to get them.

In recent comments, Congressmen Brian Higgins and Eric Massa have expressed confusion and frustration about the delays to the project, but neither seems capable of finding out what caused them. All they need to do is pick up the phone and call or e-mail the various regulatory agencies and talk to them, just like I did during my busy 18-hour day — and I don't even have a taxpayer-funded staff.

If the politicians did their homework — like I have between milking cows, baling hay, fixing fences, cutting firewood and fighting Albany — they would have learned that the delays can be blamed on one entity alone, the New York State Department of Transportation. They would have learned, as I did, that the DOT caused the delays by ignoring warnings from regulatory agencies dating back to 1997 that it would not meet requirements for compliance to obtain 404 (wetlands) permits.

But they had much more warning than that. With some digging, they may have discovered what the late John Bonfatti reported in *The News*: The state knew for more than 30 years that it was trying to build an expressway through the middle of a landslide. With some real effort, they may have found the 1963 design of the Route 219/nuclear fuel reprocessing development plan and read about the unstable soil in the area.

Instead, Massa accused the Environmental Protection Agency of attempting to delay the project. If it had not been for the interference of other confused and frustrated politicians, the environmental laws at Scobey Hill would never have been watered down. If alternative funding had not been provided to get

around those laws, the massive mess and delay would never have occurred.

Likewise, if the DOT had not attempted to violate the law and ignored the EPA and U. S. Fish and Wildlife, the Army Corps of Engineers would have granted them 404 permits all the way to Ashford Hollow. Finally, if the DOT, which is not supposed to lobby, had not given \$1.5 million to a special interest group, the recent media blitz to gin up support for the disintegrating project never would have happened.

How can a lowly farmer learn all of this when our brightest and best can't even figure out which agency to errantly blame for the mistakes made by the DOT? Why aren't they lobbying for the innocent people forced out of their homes by landslides caused by state coverups? And where is the threat to pull funding if these people are evicted before they have their settlement checks in hand?

Since the DOT is forbidden to proceed south of Ashford Hollow, all those frustrated and confused politicians are now fighting to build a \$55 million, 3.5-mile, four-lane superhighway between a hay-field and a cow pasture.


The Environmental Impact Study that politicians are trying to defend to avoid the legally required supplemental study clearly states that building this extension will neither create jobs nor make the existing road any safer.

No wonder they're confused and frustrated! Who wouldn't be?

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► Cattaraugus County

# Lawmakers unanimously support full cleanup of West Valley site

By Rick Miller  
Olean Times Herald

**LITTLE VALLEY —** Cattaraugus County lawmakers voted unanimously Wednesday in support of the full removal option for the decommissioning and cleanup at the West Valley Demonstration Project.

It was a reversal of a consensus that developed in the Development and Agriculture Committee after a presentation last week by officials from the U.S. Department of Energy and New York State Energy Research and Development Authority who favor the phased decision-making alternative in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

In supporting the sitewide removal cleanup option for the former nuclear reprocessing plant in the town of Ashford, the County Legislature joined the Seneca Nation of Indians, the Cattaraugus County Concerned Citizens and West Valley Coalition on Nuclear Wastes, which have already called for a full cleanup.

The sitewide cleanup option is projected to cost more than \$9 billion and take up to 64 years to complete, depending on funding levels. The phased decisionmaking option would cost \$1.2 billion during phase one, which would remove most facilities and clean up a radioactive groundwater plume over a seven-year period. A decision on what to do with underground tanks containing radioactive residue and two low-level burial grounds would be deferred for up to 30 years.

Lois Zendarsky, president of the Cattaraugus County Concerned Citizens, spoke to county lawmakers prior to the vote, saying, "The Concerned Citizens position is to support a full cleanup. Partial cleanup is pennywise and pound foolish. Piecemeal cleanup under the Department of Energy's preferred alternative risks fishermen in Cattaraugus Creek, and millions of others."

The resolution approved by county lawmakers calls the 64-year cleanup period under the sitewide removal



Rick Miller/Olean Times Herald

**Lois Zendarsky, president of Cattaraugus County Concerned Citizens, speaks to Cattaraugus County lawmakers Wednesday encouraging support for the sitewide cleanup alternative at the West Valley Demonstration Project.**

"absurd," and calls for a dramatic increase in annual funding "so that the process can be completed within 10 years."

Recognizing the sitewide removal would include digging up the state- and federally licensed burial grounds, the resolution called for "increased use of remote-control robotic devices to minimize, as much as possible, exposure to workers in increased radiation levels."

The resolution also states the County Legislature is aware that the cleanup will generate additional waste for which there is currently no disposal or storage site, but it calls for the federal government to consider "a more suitable site for this waste," one with less rainfall and snow, is less prone to erosion and is not next to a creek that empties into the Great Lakes.

Eric Wohlers, director of the county Health Department's Environmental Health Unit, and a member of the West Valley Citizens Task Force, said, "I think the position of the County Legislature could possibly be in the best interest of county residents for thousands of years."

He said the important things were that the cleanup, which has been ongoing since 1981, continue and that the federal government remain involved.

Members of the Citizens Task Force, which is near a final draft of its comments on

the Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the West Valley cleanup are said to be wavering between the sitewide cleanup and the phased decisionmaking alternatives. The comments are due June 8.

Legislator Charles Hebdon, D-West valley, said, "It's three miles north of my home. I'm 100 percent in favor of the total cleanup. Everyone in the town of Ashford would like to see it cleanup up too."

Legislator Norman Marsh, R-Little Valley, who was critical of the Development and Agriculture Committee's "wishy-washy" response last week, said, "The way it reads

now, I think it's good. We should get it cleaned up in less than 64 years."

He suggested all legislators be listed as co-sponsors.

On Monday, Jerry E. Burrell, R-Franklinville, indicated there was support for the option that would clean up much of the site that poses the most immediate risks, while deferring a final decision on removing the burial grounds and underground tanks.

At Wednesday morning's meeting of legislative leaders, however, it was decided to call for the sitewide cleanup instead, and that was the resolution presented to county lawmakers during party caucuses before Wednesday afternoon's meeting.

Legislature Chairman Crystal Abers, R-South Dayton, said legislators want the site cleaned up quicker than the 64 years.

Mr. Burrell said after the meeting that legislators do not want to endanger workers or residents by digging up the burial grounds before there is a technological way to safely remove, store and ship it. "Who knows what is going to happen in 64 years?" he said.

"We understand there may not be any place to store it (radioactive wastes) at this time, but I think it's (sitewide removal) the responsible position to take."

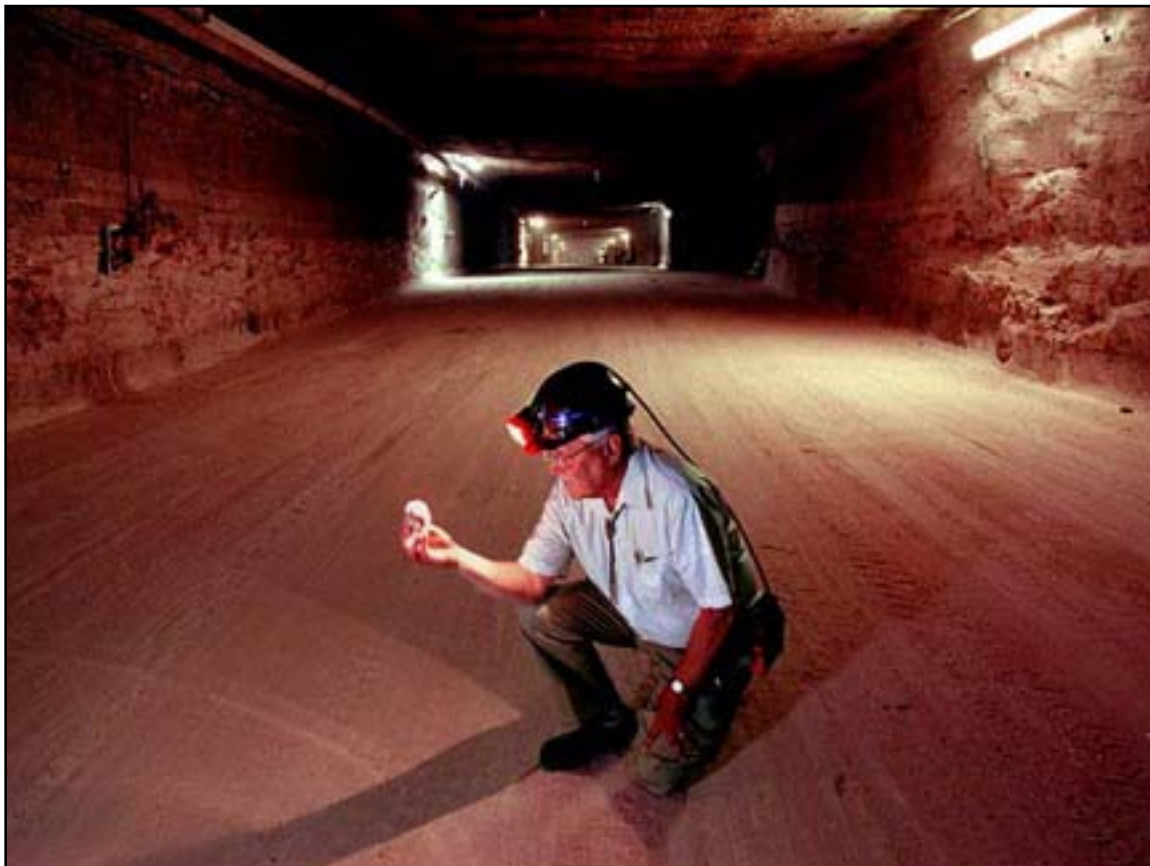
(Contact Rick Miller at [rmiller@oleantimesherald.com](mailto:rmiller@oleantimesherald.com))

## Reprocessing Nuclear Fuel Makes Sense, But Is It Sensible?

By: [Max S. Power](#)  [Print](#)

Concern over global warming resulting from burning fossil fuels brings renewed interest in [nuclear power](#). Some say that recycling uranium and other elements from nuclear fuel burned in reactors is a logical companion to nuclear electricity generation. The United States stopped reprocessing of fuel — recycling — in the late 1970s. Is it time to reconsider fuel reprocessing as well as nuclear power?

Recently, as I walked among the four massive structures that comprise the guts of Hanford's Waste Treatment Plant, I wondered about the validity of William Tucker's published [claim](#) that "there is no such thing as nuclear waste." After all, the Department of Energy is building the \$12 billion-plus complex in southeast Washington's Columbia Basin just to deal with the leftovers from reprocessing nuclear fuel. In this case, reactors burned the fuel to produce plutonium.



Advocates say nuclear power is a necessary alternative to carbon-fueled generation to meet base-load needs. [Solar](#) and [wind](#) generation, in this view, are not reliable 24/7 [power providers](#).

At present, about 20 percent of U.S. electricity comes from nuclear plants, and the federal government has received or expects license applications for 30 new [reactors](#). The present policy of the United States is that spent fuel from these reactors will be

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disposed of in a deep geologic formation, such as weapons waste that is stored at the Department of Energy's [Waste Isolation Pilot Plant](#) in [New Mexico](#). Since 1987, the [Nuclear Waste Policy Act](#) has assumed that civilian nuclear waste would be at Yucca Mountain, Nev. However, both Congress and the Obama administration have suspended work developing a waste repository there.

Tucker and other recycling advocates argue not only that recycling makes sense here as in other environmental fields, but also that it will greatly reduce the volume of highly radioactive waste to be disposed. Concern about waste disposal long has been a major stumbling block to a reinvigorated nuclear power industry.

Opponents retort that the weapons proliferation concerns and costs that stymied reprocessing 30 years ago remain solid reasons to reject recycling nuclear reactor fuel.

The United States abandoned reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel in the [late 1970s](#). France, Britain, Russia and Japan, on the other hand, continued to develop and use reprocessing facilities.

The two primary reasons the United States did not pursue reprocessing were:

- Concern over creation and separation of fissile materials (especially plutonium 239) that can fuel atomic weapons
- Cost

Congress adopted the policy of direct disposal for spent nuclear fuel after public opinion had turned against nuclear power following the accident at [Three Mile Island](#), and the abandonment both of domestic reprocessing plants and a number of nuclear power reactor projects. The commercial reprocessing facility at West Valley, N.Y, had experienced an expensive failure. Developers abandoned two others, one in Morris, Ill., and the other in Aiken, S.C. Meanwhile, the media focused public attention on the environmental problems that resulted from reprocessing for defense purposes at Hanford, Savannah River Site in South Carolina and the Idaho National Laboratory.

### **Fissile Materials**

People committed to nuclear disarmament and who fear the spread of nuclear weapons among other nations and terrorist groups oppose reprocessing because it creates more plutonium 239 — the highly fissile isotope





that fueled the Trinity test and the Nagasaki bomb.

Between 1944 and the end of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union each created about 100 metric tons of the material. (Each metric



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ton contains enough plutonium 239 to create about 167 Trinity or Nagasaki nuclear explosions.)

The Nuclear Control Institute, a highly regarded nuclear nonproliferation group, asserts that commercial power reactors have already produced six times as much plutonium as weapons [programs](#).

This plutonium could be extracted and available for weapons if commercial fuel were reprocessed. (Plutonium is created by a nuclear chain reaction in solid uranium fuel. When reprocessed, the fuel is dissolved chemically to separate out reusable uranium and plutonium.)

From the point of view of those concerned about nuclear weapons, plutonium locked up in spent fuel, whether recycled or newly created, is more acceptable than separated plutonium that could find its way into weapons. People are much less likely to steal or deal in highly radioactive solid spent fuel than in less directly harmful separated plutonium. The complexity and cost of the industrial facilities to reprocess and extract the plutonium are thought to be further deterrents to weapons proliferation. The United States and Russia have adopted a policy of taking surplus plutonium from weapons stockpiles to enrich fuel for commercial power [reactors](#).

## Cost

Based on weapons proliferation concerns, U.S. Presidents Ford and Carter adopted policies to curtail reprocessing. President Reagan did not share that point of view, and made it clear he had no problem with privately financed reprocessing — but no one started developing reprocessing facilities after his election in 1980.



It is likely that some form of government assistance is necessary to make reprocessing viable. This was part of the [Global Nuclear Energy Partnership](#) proposed by the George W. Bush



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administration in 2006. (A description of GNEP and the reprocessing principle is at [nuclear.inl.gov/gnep/](http://nuclear.inl.gov/gnep/) The Government Accountability Office assessed government participation in this report [here.](#))

The costs of cleanup of existing reprocessing facilities are notable, too. Perhaps as much as a third of the estimated \$157 billion cost of cleanup of

the Hanford, Savannah River and Idaho National Laboratory defense nuclear sites deals with the aftermath of chemical reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel. Commercial operators left their West Valley facility rather than correct its problems; the [U.S. Department of Energy](#) and the state of [New York](#) have borne the approximately \$2 billion cost of cleanup and closure.

By most accounts, new nuclear plants remain a relatively expensive option compared to carbon-fueled generating facilities — and reprocessing may well make the nuclear option even more expensive. A [report](#) commissioned by the French government in 2000 estimated that reprocessing costs more than obtaining fresh fuel and directly disposing of spent fuel.

### Balancing Costs and Impacts

The United States needs to balance a broad range of environmental concerns. Nuclear power and reprocessing are attractive in that they do not produce significant carbon emissions. However, fuel manufacturing and reprocessing do produce radioactive and chemical contaminants and wastes.

The French reprocessing plant at La Hague — hailed as a model by Tucker and others — has released substantial amounts of gaseous and liquid radioactivity since its opening in 1966. According to one calculation, its gaseous and liquid emissions of such isotopes as radioactive iodine, carbon 14, tritium, ruthenium and plutonium would account for a worldwide radiation dose about one-tenth that created by the Chernobyl accident. Even under much more stringent regulations imposed in 2007, the plant's permitted emissions will be two to four orders of magnitude greater than those allowed for a nearby nuclear power reactor.

If, as Thomas L. Friedman suggests in his book [Hot, Flat and](#)



[Crowded](#), the United States is on its way to being a BNANA (Build Nothing Anywhere Near Anything) republic, concern over reprocessing's relatively larger emissions may well be more decisive than cost in forestalling its reintroduction. At the same time, one must recognize that uranium [mining and milling](#),

and uranium [enrichment](#) for

commercial power reactors have had significant public

health, environmental and cost consequences. These must be considered if the U.S. increases its reliance on nuclear power without reprocessing.

In a recent report on nuclear power, directors of the country's national laboratories, including current Secretary of Energy Stephen Chu, argue that any worldwide increase in reliance on nuclear power is not sustainable without [reprocessing](#). The directors call for a broad research and development program addressing cost, waste and nonproliferation issues. They also regard the hiatus in American reprocessing as a benefit in that the country is not saddled with "dated recycling infrastructure."

As I stood among cranes pouring concrete over densely woven, heavy rebar at Hanford's waste treatment complex — with the stacks of two of the site's now-shuttered reprocessing plants in view — two conflicting impressions struck me:

- The immense cost in time, labor and resources required to deal with reprocessing's aftermath
- The capacity to create robust, thoughtful and, by earlier standards, much safer nuclear facilities

\* *Max S. Power's book, [America's Nuclear Wastelands: Politics, Accountability, and Cleanup](#), has been chosen one of the "Best of the Best from the University Presses" for 2009 by the American Library Association. It was published last year by the Washington State University Press.*

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## Buffalo News, 05-24-2009



Donata Ahern, who initially was attracted by the view from her home on the east branch of Cazenovia Creek in East Aurora, examines the garage of the structure, which has been ordered demolished because of the crumbling site.

### Parts of area slip sliding away

Ice Age legacy undermines some property along creeks

By Janice L. Habuda NEWS STAFF REPORTER

The sight of an Amherst house on the verge of slipping into Tonawanda Creek was shocking to many.

But it probably didn't stun Donata Ahern. Or Tonya Lewis. And it certainly didn't shock those familiar with the soils of Western New York.

The April slide that forced Jody and Chris Morphy to scramble from their Tonawanda Creek Road home wasn't the first that shifting land suddenly endangered, and experts predict it won't be the last.

"Mother Nature is always active . . . always doing something . . . always changing something," said William M. Kappel, an Ithaca-based hydrologist with the U. S. Geological Survey.

Like Ahern and Lewis, the Morphys learned a painful, expensive lesson in geology: The Ice Age still is affecting Western New York.

Even though the last glacier retreated from this area roughly 12,000 years ago, the mantle of fine-grained clay and silt sediments left behind continues to challenge development, resulting in two problems: stream bank erosion and massive slope failure. Through the years, they have manifested themselves on many occasions, including:

- A 2007 landslide in Concord that delayed the extension of the Route 219 expressway and destabilized nearby homes. The state acquired many of them through eminent domain.
- The 1994 collapse of 300 feet of bank along Cattaraugus Creek in Sardinia.
- **Questions raised in 1991 about the storage of low-level nuclear wastes in the Cattaraugus County Town of West Valley, subject to serious erosion along its waterways.**

Soil conditions are particularly challenging in communities that once were the basin of prehistoric Lake Tonawanda. That includes Amherst, with its history of "sinking" homes and the recent slide.

Local valleys carved by the retreating ice also are lined with the sediment, resulting in erosion problems along creeks in the area's watershed.

"All that fine-grained sediment is what the Amherst problem comes from—and all of the creeks in the region," Kappel said. "They all are incised into this very soft clay."

"It's not pure clay all the way through," Kappel continued. "You will get, every so often, these slumps, landslides, whatever you want to call them."

Not just here, but across upstate New York. "It's a common problem," Kappel said.

## **Lured by the view**

Two years ago, Ahern bought a home on a wooded lot above the east branch of Cazenovia Creek in East Aurora.

Why that home? “The view,” she answered. “The view.”

Ahern said floor-to-ceiling windows looking out of her sloping yard and the distant creek provided sightings of myriad wildlife.

“That’s why I bought it,” Ahern said.

But when she looked out a window the morning of March 9, after a period of windy and rainy weather, she discovered a slab of her six-acre lot had fallen. Ahern said she hadn’t heard or felt a thing.

And she had no idea how serious the situation was until a contractor, hired to repair the roof, saw the damage to the back of the house and notified the town. The home was immediately condemned.

Ahern sought refuge with a son in Buffalo. A small army of friends helped her empty the house, and she and her dog have since moved into a rental.

But Ahern, who’s retired and living on a pension, said she still owes the bank approximately \$60,000. Once assessed at \$159,000, the property now is worth about \$15,000, she said.

Demolition costs have been estimated at \$10,000.

“It’s worthless — I’m not paying on it,” she said.

Ahern said she subsequently learned about the unstable soils in the area.

“It wasn’t unknown, but it was unknown to me,” she said, adding that she wouldn’t have bought the property if she had known.

Looking back at what happened in March, Ahern said: “It had nothing to do with the creek or the floodplain. It’s because [the land] was saturated with rain and it was already unsteady.”

## **A crack in the yard**

On a snowy day in November 2006, Tonya Lewis and her husband, Kevin, first saw their future home on Boston State Road in Boston. From the backyard, the view stretches across Eighteenmile Creek and a narrow valley to Back Creek Road.

That day, the creek “looked like a serene babbling brook,” Lewis recalled.

When the Lewises inquired about flood insurance, they were told the property wasn’t in a flood plain. “I didn’t think we had anything to worry about,” she said.

The family had been in the house only a matter of weeks before a winter thaw in February 2007. The creek revealed another personality.

“When the water got really high and really fast, it cut underneath [the bank],” Lewis said.

One morning, they noticed a crack in the yard.

“My husband said, ‘Did we have an earthquake?’ ” she related.

That was the beginning of the end for a large chunk of the yard, which slumped several feet down toward the creek.

“Little by little, day after day, it was slipping and sliding,” Lewis said.

During that February thaw, Lewis said she saw whole trees being carried downstream in the raging creek waters.

Beyond the natural course of things, Lewis thinks new development in the town is contributing to the problems facing her family and dozens of others.

Already, the Lewises have spent about \$2,500 for tree removal and \$3,000 for landscape timbers to build a retaining wall.

“And that’s not going to solve the problem,” Lewis said.

The trouble is, those problems usually get attention in reaction to something happening.

At the Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District office in East Aurora, District Field Manager Mark C. Gaston said calls have been coming in “left and right” because of the publicity following the Tonawanda Creek event.

Statewide, district offices work with landowners, local governments and others on natural resource issues, including erosion control.

A wealth of information is available for the asking, starting with an Erie County soil survey, which Gaston describes as one of the best resources for home buyers.

The survey, available at the district office, in public libraries and online via the Agriculture Department — it’s easiest just to Google it—is a primer on the soils found throughout the county. Informative as it is, “It doesn’t take the place of an actual on-site investigation,” Gaston said.

The district office also has printed guidelines for stabilizing stream banks. They include such action as planting certain types of vegetation — varieties of willow, alder and dogwood, for instance—and removing trees that are leaning 30 degrees or more, while retaining the root system.

### **No cheap remedies**

Through the years, the district has worked with Erie County and other entities on stream bank stabilization projects — particularly where infrastructure is threatened.

It also works with communities, seeking grants for stabilization projects for which homeowners have to share costs. The work isn’t cheap; Gaston said a rock and vegetation stream stabilization structure costs about \$125 to \$150 per linear foot.

Gaston is confident about man’s ability to meet the challenges nature presents.

“Anything can be overcome with engineering,” he said. Then he amended his statement by: “A large amount of difficulties can be overcome with engineering.”

Kappel, the hydrologist, said: “It’s not a lost cause, . . . but we have to realize we are living in a dynamic environment.”

“The trees are not always going to be there. That stream bank is not going to be where it is now,” Kappel said. “People think nature is static. It’s anything but static. It’s very dynamic.”

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