

## **Removing West Valley waste is best option, new study says**

By Stephen T. Watson

BUFFALO NEWS, 12/3/08

Excavating and removing all the radioactive material from the West Valley nuclear waste site is costly in the short term but cheaper and safer for area residents in the long run, a new study of the site cleanup found. The study's authors say permanently burying nuclear waste at the Cattaraugus County facility would lead to higher costs and risks of radiation poisoning. "It is significantly less expensive over the long term to excavate the waste and remove it from the site than it is to keep it buried on the site," William Steinhurst, a senior consultant with Synapse Energy Economics of Massachusetts, said at a news conference Tuesday in downtown Buffalo.

The study is billed as the first of its kind to assess the full cost of cleaning up the site. It was released one week after the federal and state governments put out a draft report with their own ratings of the options for the site cleanup. This statement — from the Department of Energy and New York State Energy Research and Development Authority — favors a phased shutdown of the facility that would clean up part of the site but leave some radioactive material. The site, located 30 miles south of Buffalo, opened in the 1960s as the country's first facility for the commercial reprocessing of nuclear waste.

Much of the waste on the site will remain radioactive for hundreds of years and could expose residents to air, soil and groundwater contamination, according to the study by researchers at Synapse, Fredonia State College, Tufts University and Radioactive Waste Management Associates. That's why the study recommends the full excavation and removal of waste from the site, even though the work could take 70 or more years and cost \$9.9 billion all told. Removing the material and remediating the site could return the land to agricultural use, the report states.

Leaving waste on the site, however, may be cheaper in the short term but would force the government to closely monitor the site for centuries to come. The cost of maintaining the site while the waste is buried there could reach \$13 billion to \$27 billion — in the worst case — over the next 1,000 years. More likely is a release of radiation into the soil or groundwater and downstream into Buttermilk and Cattaraugus creeks and the Lake Erie and Lake Ontario watersheds, said Michael Wilson, a professor in Fredonia's department of geosciences.

## **Cleanup at Western NY Nuke Site Debated**

By CAROLYN THOMPSON, Associated Press, 12/3/08.

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- Federal energy officials wrestling with the decades-old question of what to do with the West Valley nuclear site are recommending a phased-in approach that would remove contaminated buildings and soil soon, while deferring for up to 30 years the larger question of whether all waste should be removed. A revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement released this week compares alternatives for the future of the Cattaraugus County site, which from 1966 to 1972 housed the nation's first commercial

nuclear reprocessing facility.

The preferred "phased decision making" alternative commits to eight to 12 years worth of work that state and federal agencies agree should be done, and allows time to further study whether the 3,300-acre site should be completely decontaminated or if buried waste should be closed in and the site managed for generations to come. "This does indicate a very sound approach to looking at the problems at West Valley and moving forward. There is work that can be done," said Bryan Bower, DOE's West Valley Demonstration project director. "There's nothing that's forcing the decision to be made today regarding those other areas. They're safe."

The release of the impact statement begins a six-month public comment period, but it was already being challenged Tuesday by environmentalists, scientists and residents who said complete decontamination of the site 30 miles south of Buffalo is the only safe alternative given its erosion-prone geology. The biggest concern is that radioactive waste will seep into nearby creeks, make its way into Lake Erie and Lake Ontario and contaminate drinking water supplies. Groups including the Center for Health, Environmental & Justice, Citizens' Environmental Coalition and Nuclear Information & Resource Service want the DOE to commit to removing the waste this year, rather than defer the decision.

"The current DOE plan is penny-wise and pound foolish," said state Sen. Catharine Young, who secured state funding to analyze the costs of digging up and removing the waste vs. closing it in. That study, conducted by Synapse Energy Economics Inc. of Boston and released Tuesday, estimated the cost of complete excavation at \$9.9 billion. Onsite buried waste would cost between \$13 billion and \$27 billion over the "first 1,000 years" that the radioactive waste would remain dangerous, the study found. "It will be less expensive over the long term to excavate the waste and remove it from the site than it is to keep it buried. And not only is it cheaper, but it's much less risky to populations in Cattaraugus, Erie and Niagara counties," said William Steinhurst, one of the study's authors.

A major obstacle to that plan, however, is that there is no federal repository for the high-level waste, nor is there a place for some of the low-level waste buried at West Valley, Bower said. That could change over time, and the phased approach would allow for that. In the meantime, pressing areas would be addressed, Bower said.

"The original 1960s reprocessing plant would be removed in its entirety and the contaminated soil around it, millions of cubic feet of soil, would be removed from the site," Bower said. "The wastewater treatment lagoons will be removed, all those other facilities that are no longer needed would be removed." What would remain, at least for the time being, would be four huge buried waste tanks which once held high-level liquid waste and two underground disposal areas.

Cleanup at the site has been ongoing since the 1980 West Valley Demonstration Project Act passed by Congress directed DOE to use the site to demonstrate a method for solidifying high-level liquid waste, and to decontaminate and decommission facilities used in the effort. The law made the state responsible for 10 percent of the costs, and the DOE responsible for the rest. With the solidification of more than 600,000 gallons of high-level liquid radioactive waste completed in 2002, the state and federal governments have been

trying to decide how to wrap up the project. A final decision is expected in 2009.

## **Enviros: Ship all nuke waste away from West Valley**

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By Jay Gallagher, Albany Bureau Chief

ALBANY -- The state and federal government should scrap plans to leave some nuclear waste on the site of a closed fuel-reprocessing plant in West Valley, Cattaraugus County, for the time being, and instead dig it up and ship it elsewhere, according to a report released today. Although unearthing tons of waste and shipping it away would cost almost \$10 billion and take decades, it is still better and cheaper than leaving the waste in the ground, where it is likely eventually to leak into Lake Erie, according to the report. Such an occurrence could end up costing as much as \$27 billion in damage, according to the report.

The study by Synapse Energy Economics of Massachusetts, funded with \$90,000 in taxpayer money from Sen. Catharine Young, R-Olean, is at odds with a recent report from the federal Energy Department, which has a proposal to spend \$1 billion to clean up some waste over the next 12 years but defer a decision on what to do with the rest of the waste for as long as 30 years. The Energy Department is expected to decide what to do within a year. The federal government has spent more than \$2 billion and the state \$250 million since 1972 trying to clean up the site, which housed a company that reprocessed nuclear fuel for six years before closing in 1972. It also took radioactive waste from nuclear power plants from 1963 to 1974. About 2 million tons of radioactive waste and dirt is stored on the site. A hangup in removing the waste has been that there is as of yet no federal repository to send the spent fuel to. Much of the waste will remain radioactive and dangerous for thousands of years.

But leaving it in West Valley is dangerous because "it is sitting on geologically unstable plateau near an active stream" that eventually drains into Lake Erie, said William Steinhurst of Synapse Energy Economics, which conducted the study. He said the waste has the potential to pollute lakes Erie and Ontario. The site, in the Town of Ashford, is about 30 miles southeast of Buffalo. Bryan Bower of the federal Energy Department said the agency is now working on projects that will remove material that poses an imminent danger, including radioactive dirt that has been moving underground. He said it is prudent to wait longer -- as much as 30 years -- to decide what to do with the waste that doesn't pose an immediate threat. "The disposal areas take up many acres, and it will be expensive to clean it up," Bower said. "We want to make sure we get the decisions right." Tom Attridge, the New York State Energy and Research Authority project manager at West Valley, pointed out that the short-term plan also includes taking down the main building where the reprocessing took place as well as removing a water-treatment facility associated with it.

As for the rest of the waste, he said, "We want to continue to look at what to do with those facilities." But the site needs to be cleaned up completely as soon as possible, an activist said. "The decision to clean up the site needs to be made now -- not some time in the future," said Judith Einach of the Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes. Attridge said

today he had just started to review the environmentalists' report. The authors of the report said they plan to brief federal and state officials over the next few days on their recommendations.

*Albany Watch: Insights and Tidbits From the State Capitol  
Politics on the Hudson*

**Study: Ship West Valley waste elsewhere**

December 2, 2008, Jay Gallagher

The state and federal government should scrap plans to store nuclear waste on the site of a closed fuel-reprocessing plant in West Valley, Cattaraugus County, and instead dig it up and ship it elsewhere, according to a report released today. Although digging up tons of waste and shipping it away would cost almost \$10 billion and take more than 60 years, it is still better than leaving the waste in the ground, where it is likely eventually to leak into Lake Erie, according to the report.

The study by Synapse Energy Economics of Massachusetts, funded with \$90,000 in taxpayer money from Sen. Catharine Young, R-Olean, is at odds with a recent report from the federal Energy Department, which concluded it's better and cheaper to leave the waste where it is. The Energy Department will decide what to do within six months.

The state has already spent \$250 million trying to clean up the site, which housed a company that reprocessed nuclear fuel for six years before closing in 1972. A hangup has been that there is as of yet no federal repository to send the fuel to. Much of the waste will remain radioactive and dangerous for thousands of years.