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Meeting Thursday will detail next steps for West Valley nuclear cleanup

By RICK MILLER, *Olean Times Herald* – February 28, 2018

BUFFALO — A coalition of environmental groups is hosting a program Thursday on the **West Valley Demonstration Project** and the next step in the decades-long cleanup of the nation's first commercial nuclear reprocessing plant.

Members of the Western New York Environmental Alliance will hold a public information meeting on next phase of the West Valley cleanup at the Burchfield Penney Art Center, 1300 Elmwood Ave., beginning at 7 p.m.

Dr. Alan Lockwood, professor emeritus from the UB Medical School and senior scientist with Physicians for Social Responsibility will present a talk about the health impacts of radiation, "So You Don't Want Nuclear Waste in your Water?"

His presentation will be followed by a panel discussion to include Agnes Williams, of the Indigenous Women's Network, Barbara Warren of the Citizens' Environmental Coalition, Deborah Hayes of Communications Workers of America and Diane D'Arrigo of the Nuclear Information Resource Service.

The meeting is to help the public prepare for the upcoming scoping hearings for the West Valley Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on March 19, 20 and 21 in West Valley, Buffalo and Irving, said Joanne Hoffmeister, president of the West Valley Coalition of West Valley Nuclear Wastes, one of the sponsors of the meeting.

Hoffmeister, who has been involved in the issues surrounding West Valley for four decades, said, "An array of nuclear waste has been stored and some buried on an erodible plateau since the 1960s, put in place before there were any laws on the siting of such dangerous waste. This site is managed by the Department of Energy and owned by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, agencies responsible for cleaning up the waste and protecting public health and our waters."

Hoffmeister said the upcoming West Valley Phase II scoping sessions are very, very important. The Coalition is willing to wait for a national nuclear waste repository to move radioactive wastes from the site, but the wastes should be "packaged securely and monitored" in the interim.

"We meant to make sure good decisions are made at West Valley," she added. "It has to have a safe place to go," she said of the nuclear waste at the site.

Charley Bowman, of the Sierra Club Niagara Group, said the protection of fresh water supplies is key.

"There are enormous amounts of radioactivity (100,000's of Curies) buried and stored at the West Valley nuclear waste site," Bowman said. "Some of that radioactivity is escaping beyond the site boundaries and now resides in the

surrounding unstable soils, trees and creeks. Some of the radioactive elements will be dangerous for millions of years.”

The Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes has been afraid from the start that the Department of Energy would seek to leave much of the waste buried where it is. That includes large steel tanks that still hold radioactive residue and the low-level radioactive waste in landfills operated by the (federal) Nuclear Regulatory Commission and New York State Energy Research and Development Authority.

These low-level radioactive landfills threaten the drinking water of hundreds of thousands of Western New Yorkers if they were to fail and leak into nearby creeks that empty into Cattaraugus Creek and Lake Erie, Hoffmeister said. A leak could also contaminate Lake Erie.