

WVDP conducts virtual exercise to prepare for emergency incidents

By Olean Times Herald staff



Emergency response personnel at the West Valley Demonstration Project participate in a tabletop exercise to validate their response to a hypothetical incident and their ability to minimize the potential impact to the employees, the public and the environment.

Photo provided

WEST VALLEY — The U.S. Department of Energy and its cleanup contractor at the **West Valley Demonstration Project** conducted a recent emergency response exercise with off-site emergency response agencies.

A virtual tabletop format was used instead of a hands-on exercise due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This year's exercise included representatives from Cattaraugus County Sheriff's Department, Cattaraugus County Special Response Team and West Valley Volunteer Hose Fire and Rescue, with evaluation assistance from the Department of Energy-West Valley Demonstration Project.

The exercise, which was based on a hypothetical incident, tested the skills and response of these local agencies as well as the site's security force and Operational Response Team.

Disasters can occur at any time, and a knowledgeable, well-trained emergency response team can significantly improve the outcome of any event – exercises provide this training. Tabletop exercises also provide constructive feedback to improve those areas identified during the hypothetical incident.

OLEAN TIMES HERALD

Friday, January 15, 2021

“We understand the importance and benefit of having trained emergency responders working at West Valley,” said Bryan Bower, WVDP director for the U.S. Department of Energy. “We appreciate their continued commitment to training; and their effort to protect the health and safety of our workers and the public.”

This exercise, held at the WVDP site and New York State retained premises, was designed to validate the team’s response to an unannounced hypothetical incident and their ability to minimize the potential impact to the employees, the public and the environment.

“You can never practice enough for emergencies,” CH2M HILL BWXT West Valley Event and Emergency Management Manager Kevin Murray said. “We must always be learning, training, and evaluating our performance, so that we can effectively handle whatever comes our way.”

As the exercise unfolded, each member of the Emergency Response Team would describe and discuss their actions to minimize the impact of the incident.

These discussions provided feedback to the controllers and evaluators on whether the exercise’s objectives were being met; and determine if the organization could effectively handle an emergency event, respectively.

WVDP personnel helped develop the scenario and supported the exercise as controllers, which included coordinating the many tasks that had to occur to make it more realistic and truly test responders from beginning to end.