



West Valley Citizen Task Force

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Task Force Pushes for More Cleanup of Groundwater Plume

West Valley, NY – At a recent meeting of the West Valley Citizen Task Force (CTF), members approved a letter to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) expressing concern about the continued spread of a radioactive groundwater plume into previously uncontaminated land at the West Valley Demonstration Project.

While the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is required by federal law to decontaminate the site, they have thus far refused to assume any responsibility for addressing the migrating groundwater contamination. The CTF is requesting that the NRC Commissioners take action to force DOE to clean up the groundwater plume, not merely monitor its movement.

In its letter, the CTF questioned why NRC appears to be satisfied with the DOE's inaction rather than enforcing cleanup in the interest of public safety. Meanwhile, DOE claims that the spread of the plume is not an immediate threat to health and safety because it is not affecting property with public access, yet. The Task Force is concerned that allowing continued unchecked migration of the contamination will increase the difficulty of decommissioning the site and compromise future use of the land.

CTF members expressed concern that it is only a matter of time before radioactive strontium will appear in the water supply of Buffalo and other major cities drawing their water from the Great Lakes.

Emanating from a leak at the original Main Process Building almost forty years ago, the groundwater plume continues to spread beyond the West Valley Demonstration Project premises onto portions of the land held by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA). Disagreement between state officials and DOE over this and similar responsibilities at the site has resulted recently in New York's filing of a lawsuit to expedite and ensure proper cleanup.

Last Fall, the Task Force wrote to federal and state leaders at DOE and NYSERDA, expressing frustration at the inability of government officials at various levels to come to agreement. The site is managed jointly by the DOE and NYSERDA, with the DOE as lead agency. However, a breakdown in negotiations over cleanup responsibilities occurred a few years ago, and while much low-level waste has been moved off site, a great deal of high- and low-level contamination remains at the site. The lack

of completion of an Environmental Impact Statement and final decision for cleanup has resulted in drastic cutbacks in funding and large layoffs of the trained workforce.

Delays in decision-making and disagreements over responsibilities have decreased the likelihood of DOE performing a full, proper and timely cleanup of the site. The CTF believes that would be unacceptable to the surrounding communities, the people of Western New York, and, indeed, all New York taxpayers who would then be financially responsible for the cleanup of contamination that DOE leaves behind.

The CTF meets the fourth Wednesday of each month at the Ashford Office Complex on Route 219 in Ashford Hollow. The next CTF meeting will be held at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, January 24, 2007 and is open to the public.