



August 23, 2007

Ms. Laura Magee, Editor
Springville Journal
Springville, NY 14141

Letter to the Editor:

This letter is sent by the West Valley Citizen Task Force (CTF) in response to the article that appeared in the August 16 edition of the Springville Journal entitled "Radioactive Plume at WVDP not a Health or Safety Threat."

First, the article lacked balance and only included one side of this controversial subject. Journal staff only interviewed the Department of Energy (DOE) and their contractor. No attempt was made to contact either State or CTF representatives, otherwise a very different viewpoint about the concerns and safety of the constantly spreading radioactive North Plateau groundwater plume would have been revealed to your readers.

As was accurately reported, a leak of radionuclides, mostly Strontium 90 (Sr 90), occurred in the main process building of the West Valley nuclear reprocessing facility around 1969. It was not recognized for many years, and has never received any effective remediation. It is advancing steadily toward Cattaraugus Creek. Already seepage has been documented into a drainage ditch, which flows into Frank's Creek, one of the tributaries of the Cattaraugus. The concentration of radioactivity in these seeps is steadily increasing. Once it enters the Cattaraugus, it will then go to Lake Erie, where it will mix with the water that flows toward the drinking water intakes of Buffalo, Rochester, Toronto, and other communities that use Lake Erie or Ontario as a source of drinking water. Left unaddressed, and depending on dilution, this plume may eventually pose a measurable health and safety risk to people and animals exposed downstream of the site.

One of the claims of the DOE and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is that the total amount of radioactive substances released, when diluted by the large volume of water in the Great Lakes, will not expose individual downstream citizens to any dangerous levels of radiation (i.e. "health and safety not threatened"). We of the CTF believe however, that Sr 90 from the West Valley site should not be permitted to contaminate the Great Lakes in any amount. Dilution is not the solution. Pollution should be stopped at its source.

Consider that in December of 2006 the CTF sent a letter to the chairman of the NRC expressing our dismay at the DOE's years of inaction in preventing the spread of the plume. We also questioned the NRC's bystander role in allowing the DOE to merely monitor the continual spread of the plume rather than requiring a plan to address the source of the contamination. The fact is, their two attempts to install mitigation treatment systems (i.e. the 1995 pump and treat well, and the 1999 permeable treatment wall) were not effective in capturing the plume or retarding its spread. As a result the plume has now contaminated an even greater volume of previously clean soils. Every day that mitigation is delayed, cleanup costs escalate ever higher. As reported, DOE has known about the plume for over 15 years. Back then the plume was a fraction of the size it is today.

The CTF has requested that the NRC require the DOE take effective action in stopping the seepage of Sr 90 into the Great Lakes.

On Behalf of the CTF,

Dr. Tim Siepel
Mr. Eric Wohlers

West Valley Citizens Task Force

c/o Cindy Cook, Facilitator ♦ PO Box 2 ♦ Adamant, VT 05640 ♦ ccook@adamantaccord.com ♦ 802-223-1330