

OLEAN TIMES HERALD

‘Dig it up’ popular demand at West Valley scoping session

By RICK MILLER, Olean Times Herald, March 20, 2018



Barry Miller of Hinsdale speaks Monday night at the first of three scoping sessions on the phase 2 cleanup at the West Valley Demonstration Project. Miller and other speakers were seeking a full cleanup at the site of the nation's first and only commercial spent nuclear fuel reprocessing plant in the town of Ashford. Similar meetings will be held in Buffalo tonight and on the Cattaraugus Territory of the Seneca Nation of Indians on Wednesday.

WEST VALLEY — A familiar refrain was heard in West Valley Monday night. “Dig it up,” said Barbara Dyscant, an activist from Hinsdale. She was among speakers who urged U.S. Department of Energy to “do a complete cleanup at West Valley” at the first of three scoping sessions on the phase 2 cleanup of the West Valley Demonstration Project.

Many attendees asked for all radioactive and hazardous waste at the site be exhumed and contained in above ground retrievable storage until an off-site disposal area is available.

Dyscant said the radioactive waste “poses a deadly threat to Western New York. There is no safe level of low-level exposure,” she added. If the waste is not removed, it will erode into local creeks and into Cattaraugus Creek which empties into Lake Erie.

According to the DOE’s Feb. 23 notice in the Federal Register, alternatives being considering for the site are:

- Sitewide close-in-place, which would rely on engineered barriers to prevent erosion from impacting buried wastes including the tank farm and state and federally licensed low-level disposal sites.
- Sitewide removal alternative, which would remove all facilities, contaminated soil and groundwater to allow unrestricted release of the property.
- Hybrid alternatives that would provide for complete or partial removal of some facilities while leaving other facilities under close-in-place protocols.

Officials said a fourth alternative of no action was not under consideration.

These are the first steps the U.S. Department of Energy and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) are undertaking for the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) which was “phased decision-making.” That alternative from the 2010 Final Environmental Impact Statement put off the more difficult decision of how much of a cleanup would be done at the 3,100-acre site.

It was operated from 1966 to 1972 when Nuclear Fuel Services extracted plutonium and uranium from spent nuclear fuel rods. Some of the material was defense related. NYSERDA claims for that reason that the DOE should store the materials off site.

There are 56 concrete casks at the site containing 275 stainless steel canisters of solidified high-level radioactive material encased in glass. That is all that remains of what was once 600,000 gallons of high-level radioactive liquid waste.

The scoping process involving the Phase 2 SEIS involves public comment through April 23. Those who cannot attend one of the scoping sessions can fill out a comment on the project website at www.SEISWestValleySite.com.

Comments can also be emailed to SEISWestValleySite@emcbc.doe.gov.

The draft SEIS is not expected to be completed and ready for public comment until late 2020. It will contain a preferred alternative agreed upon by the DOE and NYSERDA. There will be a six-month comment period at that time.

Speakers at Monday’s scoping session pointed out that comments are being sought before studies have been completed.

One study is called probabilistic performance assessment which deals with long-term impacts at the site that could release radioactivity into the air or water. That study is not complete.

Diane D'Arrigo, radioactive waste director of the Nuclear Information and Research Group, pointed out the Engineered Barrier Group had not issued a report, which could indicate it was not a long-term solution for dangerous radioactivity that persists for thousands or millions of years.

Everyone's goal, D'Arrigo said, was the "safest outcome for this site." She said it appears that much of the site's radioactive components will remain on site indefinitely. It is a mistake, she said, to "leave long-lasting radioactive material at a site that is already leaking."