



Local activists highlight connection between indigenous and nuclear issues

By [KYLE S. MACKIE](#) • 08-09-2019 - 9 HOURS AGO



Representatives from local indigenous and environmental groups gathered ahead of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

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A celebration of Indigenous Peoples and Nuclear-Free Future Day returns Friday to the Buffalo History Museum. Ahead of the event, local Native Americans and environmental activists explained how the issues of indigenous peoples and nuclear power are intertwined.

Representatives from local indigenous communities, the Western New York Peace Center and Peace Action New York State gathered Tuesday at the history museum's Japanese Garden. Agnes Williams, coordinator of the organization



Indigenous Women's Initiatives, helped hold up two colorful banners that read, "No More Waste" and "Water is Life."

"The nuclear issue is very important to us as indigenous people because we're on the beginning and the end of the nuclear chain, at uranium mining and waste disposal," said Williams, who is a member of the Seneca Nation.

Williams and other speakers discussed the long history of indigenous land around the world and in the U.S. being taken and used for mining, testing of nuclear weapons and then disposal of radioactive waste.

"We thank indigenous wisdom for the guidance," said Victoria Ross, executive director of WNY Peace Center. "All of our issues are connected. We are working to #UniteTheStruggles."

There's at least one local example of nuclear waste disposal going awry: The **West Valley Demonstration Project**, which operated under Nuclear Fuel Services from 1966 to 1972. Despite its brief tenure, the site accumulated more than 600,000 gallons of high-level waste in onsite storage tanks, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists. West Valley also had an "alarming" record of worker exposures to radiation.

Jason Corwin, media director for the Seneca Nation, said West Valley "was supposed to be a technological breakthrough for reprocessing this waste into usable fuel again. Instead, it was a huge technological failure."



WBFO has [reported](#) on the continued exposure to radiation in the Seneca Nation's Cattaraugus Territory as a result of contamination of the Buttermilk Creek. And while cleanup efforts for the West Valley site have been underway since 1980, Corwin said a long-overdue full cleanup is the only acceptable option moving forward.

Another local nuclear waste-related issue discussed Tuesday was the 2017 federal court decision that allowed the transport of liquid nuclear waste from Chalk River Laboratories in Ontario, Canada, to a reprocessing facility in Aiken, South Carolina. That transportation route allegedly crosses the Peace Bridge.

"These trucks are carrying radioactive materials over the water supply for seven states, and they are driving by our communities and our families," said Courtney Annese, a social worker and intern at WNY Peace Center. "This is an unacceptable risk."

WBFO contacted the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority, the U.S. Department of Energy and Representative Brian Higgins' district office for comment, but they have not yet responded.

In May 2017, when The Buffalo News [reported](#) that the first nuclear waste shipment had arrived in South Carolina, federal officials neither confirmed or denied whether the truck carrying it had crossed the Peace Bridge.

Williams, of Indigenous Women's Initiatives, said more information about the connection between indigenous and nuclear issues will be available at Friday's event from 3 to 9 p.m. at the Buffalo History Museum.

"We'd like to have everyone come and listen to our speakers, enjoy the foods, the arts and crafts [and] we have vendors," she told WBFO. She also said the event will give attendees an experience of Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Nations) culture, and that it will conclude with a lantern ceremony and interfaith prayer service.