

Another Voice: West Valley site demolition will be handled safely

Martin Willet

A recent opinion piece published by The Buffalo News posed the question, “Can open-air demolition of the former nuclear fuel reprocessing facilities located in West Valley be performed safely?,” while a letter to the editor implied that human health risks such as excess infant mortality had previously been linked to the West Valley operation.

In both cases, unsubstantiated human health threats and links were used to support the layman’s solution to the perceived problems. Solutions, that if applied, would likely cost the U.S. taxpayer billions of additional tax dollars to implement and with little or no additional risk reduction or benefit to public safety.

Seeing that we trust the training and education of medical doctors, pilots and engineers with our health and safety, so also we should expect that the nuclear, environmental and other engineering and scientific professionals focused on the decommissioning and decontamination at West Valley will design and implement safe and cost-effective solutions that meet project goals and ensure both the near- and long-term safety of the public and the environment.

As concerned citizens, you can help facilitate these goals by working with industry scientists and engineers asking informed questions, relating public concerns, and allowing the experts to work for you designing cost-effective solutions that address public safety and reach project goals.

Managers and engineers at West Valley and throughout the nation are working diligently to remove environmental threats to the public health. That is their job, they are working on behalf of us all, and they have nothing to gain and everything to lose if the results of their efforts fail to provide public confidence and safety.

Before we go prescribing costly solutions to problems not fully understood, it would be helpful to recall some of the West Valley accomplishments. West Valley engineers and scientists have accomplished first-of-its-kind achievements in radioactive system design and nuclear cleanup accomplishments. Efforts have resulted in successfully solidifying more than 600,000 gallons of highly radioactive liquid waste; safely decontaminating and demolishing contaminated facilities; treatment of contaminated groundwater leaking from aging legacy facilities; removal and shipment of spent nuclear fuel to secure off-site storage and many other engineering and system design accomplishments that allowed work to be performed safely and without environmental insult.

As cleanup operations were ongoing, site air and water quality have been continually monitored and data are reported and documented for public and regulatory review annually or upon request. Environmental monitoring has and always will be integral to the ongoing work at West Valley and along with regulatory oversight and public participation will ensure the public health and safety and environmental protection.

As local citizens, we should make it our goal to work with the experts and site managers at nuclear and other hazardous waste sites to make sure local concerns are addressed and that tax dollars are being spent wisely and efficiently.

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