

Citizen Task Force shares evidence of erosion damage at former nuclear fuel reprocessing facility

BY KATHLEEN KELLOGG

A citizen advisory group following nuclear waste cleanup activities at the **West Valley Demonstration Project** will request a presentation prior to accepting an invitation to join Erie County's Climate Resilience planning effort.

The group met in an Oct. 27th virtual session to discuss this and other topics related to the ongoing cleanup and a Phase 2 Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on decommissioning of the former commercial nuclear fuel reprocessing center. The site covers 200 acres and was built in the 1960's to recycle spent nuclear fuel, but was shut down after only a few years.

CTF members received an update from Department of Energy officials and consultants on the ongoing cleanup efforts.

Plans call for a December demolition of the Load-in Facility of the main plant process building under the management of CH2M HILL BWXT West Valley, LLC (CHBWV), a DOE contractor. Most of the wastes at the site are under federal jurisdiction. The **New York State Energy Research and Development Authority** partners with the DOE because New York is responsible for a portion of the buried wastes.

The waste reduction efforts, demolition plans and preparations for the updated DSEIS are expected to be among the topics discussed at the **WVDP** Quarterly Public Meeting Nov. 17th. The public may observe and comment and should contact Joseph Pillittere by email at joseph.pillittere@chbwv.com or by phone at 716 942-4996 to receive an invitation and link to sign in to the meeting.

During the CTF session, Kelly Wooley, Deputy General Manager for the DOE, reported on a spill incident that occurred the day before the meeting during transfer of a large waste container by trailer from the main plant to the north storage yard. Liquid was seen draining from a sampling port in the tank's storage cover and the operation was halted, the tank was stabilized, and sampling showed no detectible levels of radioactivity or spread. An investigation concluded the leaking liquid was likely snow and rainwater that had infiltrated a two-foot diameter plug on the top of the cover surrounding the tank sometime after it had been packaged in 1986.

Wooley also reported completion of deactivation and grouting of the General Purpose Cell, progress in the pressurized nitrogen-based cutting and cleaning of Strontium-90 and plutonium from walls in the Product Purification Cell, as well as removal of a floor in the Acid Recovery Cell to enable removal of wastes, and with a number of other preparations to ready the main plant building.

Work continues at other portions of the site, including modifications of the former Drum Cell holding facility to receive more waste in the demolition process. Also, cleanup continues related to the excavation of a permeable treatment wall that had been constructed to filter an ongoing Strontium-90 leak. This has resulted in 259 intermodal containers filled with soil and 87 containers filled with debris, shipping of 333 containers in 57 rail cars to a facility, and receiving and preparing 231 empty intermodal containers, as of Oct. 21st.

Four shielded containers will be designed to remove a quantity of dangerous legacy waste; plans continue around characterizing the 1,100 gallons of sludge and 2,800 gallons of high level radioactive liquid waste remaining in the

ellicottvilleNOW

LOCALLY OWNED & PUBLISHED ~ WIDELY DISTRIBUTED ◆ November 4-17, 2021
Official Newspaper of the Village of Ellicottville ~ Published every other Thursday

underground tank 8D-4, one of several in a tank farm. And design is in progress for taking a waste lagoon out of service. Finally, Wooley reported that Covid-19 protocols for federal employees and contractors will require vaccination no later than Dec. 8th, with 75 percent already fully vaccinated.

CTF discussion then turned to obtaining professional opinions to help with a response to a Probabilistic Performance Assessment and the upcoming Phase 2 DSEIS. The PPA is an attempt to assess and quantify remaining wastes based on old burial records and probabilities. CTF member Ray Vaughn asked members for feedback on his six-page outline on these topics, the advisability of forming a work group and seeking expert opinions, while requesting technical presentations from **NYSERDA** and DOE. All agreed and urged Vaughn to share his outline with the agencies and request their interpretation.

“Yes, they have to present it to us,” said CTF member Joe Patti, a West Valley business owner and representative of the Volunteer Hose Co. and Chamber of Commerce. “We are blessed and unique.”

On the topic of Erie County’s climate change outreach efforts, the group supported networking about concerns for erosion and climate issues on the **West Valley** site.

“New York State is working on climate adaptation,” said Ex-Officio member Bryan Bower, DOE director at **WVDP**.

“I am interested in their plan and there is every reason why the **West Valley** site should be considered in the Erie County plan,” said CTF member Kathy McGoldrick, of the Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes. “It’s about time and it’s wonderful Erie County is taking an interest, given they’re downstream (from the site).”

Members of the group, many of whom have been meeting since its formation in 1997, expressed interest at educating a new generation of stakeholders and one joked devising a “succession plan” to assure the future existence of CTF through additional years for the cleanup.

Some watchers are nervous about cleanup efforts and the possibility of exposing the surrounding communities with radioactive nucleides in air or water. Some advocate a covered demolition of the **WVDP** buildings.

A document repository and other information about the site’s history and subsequent containment and cleanup efforts can be seen at chbvv.com. The CTF set its next virtual meeting date as December 15th. To register for attendance, visit westvalleyctf.org/meeting-information.