

Army Corps discusses radiation removal plans at NFSS

Corps envisions spring 2024 startup; Massive IWCS cleanup to take years

BY TERRY DUFFY
Editor-in-Chief

The community learned much more this week on plans by the Army Corps, Buffalo District, for complete removal of World War II-era radioactive wastes on the former Lake Ontario Ordinance Works site in northern Lewiston.

Located at the U.S. government-owned and -operated, 191-acre Niagara Falls Storage Site on Pletcher Road, the 10-acre Interim Waste Containment Structure at NFSS was constructed by the U.S. Department of Energy in the mid-1980s. Its purpose was for temporary storage of a number of radioactive residues, including high-activity K-65 wastes that were transported to Lewiston in the years following WWII.

Tuesday's information session at the Lewiston Senior Center provided insight on the massive Army Corps cleanup now in de-

sign planning. Dave Romano, Buffalo District deputy engineer, speaking on behalf of Lt. Col. Colby K. Krug, district commander, opened by telling the roughly 60 in attendance the remediation work at NFSS is one of nine such projects underway in the area.

"We've assembled regional and national experts" to work on this project," he said.

Estimated to cost in excess of \$500 million, government funding for the project is ongoing through Army Corps budget appropriations and subject to current and future congressional approvals. The IWCS removal project, which is being facilitated under the federal government's Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program, is divided into three phases, according to officials.

"Were moving from the investigation phase to the remedial design, remedial planning and remedial action," Romano said. "We're doing what we said we were going to do when we signed the record of decision. We're operating unrestrained (on funding). We were able to award some very large contracts to carry us through."

"These are all different remedial phases at NFSS," commented Brett, an Army Corps technical staffer. "Phase 2 is 91% of the

radiation risk, and it's 1% of the items. It's high-level risk, but very low volume in the overall project site."

He said the phase 2 remedial design work for removal of the high-level wastes would continue toward phase 3 – the balance of the IWCS contamination that is primarily low-level radioactive waste.

"That's a huge portion, 99% of the bulk of the volume," Brett said. "Currently we're working through the contractor that will continue through late winter." As to the actual removal, the Army Corps anticipates a startup by the spring of 2024 that would cover a 16-week period. Detailed logistics covering transportation, which is part of the phase 1 remedial design, remain in development. Officials stressed that transit routes under consideration would not include any areas around local schools or on the Tuscarora Reservation. They estimated that 640 trucks would be involved on area roadways through the overall process.

Jeff Hall, Army Corps chief of environmental engineering at the NFSS, provided details on what this actual removal process will involve.

"It's excavating the material, packaging it safely, getting it on the road safely, and getting it to an approved facility," Hall said, as he discussed the phase 1 remediation activities. Discussing a recent cleanup at the Linde site surrounded by a neighborhood in Tonawanda, he said, "We have air monitoring locally and around our excavation areas. It's paramount – protecting our workers, protecting the public."

Turning to the design plans for Lewiston, he said, "We're still working with our contractor, Envirofix, working on the plans, what kinds of trucks and where the materials are going to go to."

As far as preparation the material for removal, he said, "Everything's always lined, front-end loaders pull material and put it into lined railcars."

He likened the waste encasement process to that of "burrito bags."

"It's covered on the top with encapsulated waste, then there's another tarp that will go on top. Essentially it's leaving the site as per all DOT regulations and with an eye protection for the public."

Hall said phases 2 and 3 are focused on the actual cleanup of the IWCS.

"Our record of decision is that everything goes, and removing the complete contents and shipping them out of state," he said. "Phase 2 has begun. We awarded a contract to Jacobs Engineering. They are working through the design right now."

Hall said the IWCS was built in the mid-to-late-1980s and is still functioning as intended: "(It) contains atomic-era waste, 10 acres in area, about 34 feet above grade, 10-15 feet below grade. It was designed to safely contain activity radio waste, prevents rain-water infiltration and migration of groundwater, and also retards radon gasses that's generated in waste materials.

"The takeaway is that the IWCS is still performing as intended. It's safe for the workers on site and also for the public."

Hall said conceptual designs for the excavation are still in progress and subject to Army Corps review. "We're also going to do an evaluation engineering study, and once (that's done) there will be a preliminary design."

That includes what the Army Corps said would be a complete covering of the IWCS, where a structure likened to a high-tech golf dome would be built before the mound is broken. Hall showed an overview map where "high-activity" K-65 wastes are located in the center of the site.

"That facility is going to be constructed to prevent the release of radon gas to the atmosphere," he said. "There's going to be carbon beds and particular filters to filter all the air locally at the excavation area and also in that building.

"It's likely we're going to have remote-operated equipment while we're doing that work, again to protect our workers. That structure is also going to protect the rest of the facility. All

work we do is also going to be in accordance ... with preventing any releases above air limits.

"One feature of the design is that our engineers are working towards making sure that all truck traffic always stays on clean areas."

Hall said trucks would enter a gate at NFSS to drop off empty trailers and then pick up the loaded and fully covered trailers: "The idea is that a truck never enters a dirty zone; you don't have to worry about washing it. The containers they are picking up (will) have been standing clean (already)."

"Essentially, what this process facility is doing is, as the waste gets retrieved, it's going to (be) slurried to this waste stabilization facility, blended with fly ash (and concrete materials). ... It's a concrete model inside a steel cask and then we seal them," he said of the processing of the wastes for removal.

Hall said lower-level radioactive wastes that surround the K-65s on the north and south ends of the IWCS would be excavated and stabilized in the same fashion: "It will then be safe to travel down the road (for removal) and down to west Texas."

Hall said designs plans for phase 2 are due to the Army Corps for review this month: "We want to make sure we're doing everything safely, most economically, most efficiently.

"After that, the contractor will work on 60% of the design (of IWCS remediation), which is preliminary, and that's due in January 2025. We expect 100% completion by 2027, but we're not waiting for the design to start our remedial action planning; we're already doing that now."

Hall said Army Corps engineers are focused, at this point, on the details of the various construction work projects, which include construction of roads, warehouse buildings and similar structures at NFSS. He said Envirofix designers are working on the task orders for phase 1, and the rest of the work would be supporting the design effort.

The Army Corps session continued with environmental surveillance discussions on the 27 vicinity properties – those found outside of the NFSS proper. These include H-Prime, located at nearby CWM Chemical Services; Property X, owned by the Town of Lewiston; and E-Prime.

The meeting closed with Army Corps public affairs representative Amy Gaskill telling visitors her group would hold a detailed update on this project in early 2024.

"In March, we're looking at another information session like this, where we will share the work plans that are being developed now for this phase 1 remediation," she said. "That will be an opportunity to share with you exactly what type of activities are taking place, to get those materials off site. And no material will move until we share that work plan with you."

For more information on the Army Corps' IWCS remediation project, visit <https://www.lrb.usace.army.mil/Missions/HTRW/FUSRAP/Niagara-Falls-Storage-Site/>.

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NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
POWER AUTHORITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

The Power Authority of the State of New York (Authority) will hold a public hearing as detailed below on a proposed form of Contract for the sale of hydropower to Commitment 2000, Inc. and proposed form of Contracts for the extension of the sale of hydropower to Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation d/b/a National Grid, New York State Electric and Gas Corporation, and Rochester Gas and Electric Corporation.


Copies of the proposed Contract forms may be inspected at the Authority's office at the address below, or online at the Authority's Web site, www.nypa.gov.

Those wishing to make oral statements at the hearing are asked to provide to the Authority, in writing, in advance of the hearing, their name(s) and the name of the organization or group they represent. Oral statements should be limited to five minutes. Speakers should also provide two copies of their oral statements.

Hearing Date: November 15, 2023
Hearing Times: 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
Hearing Location: 535 Washington Street
2nd Floor Conference Room
Buffalo, New York 14203

Written statements provided to the Authority by close of business on Thursday, November 16, 2023, will also become part of the record of the hearing. For further information, including the address of other Authority offices at which copies of the proposed Contract forms may be inspected, contact:

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