

West Valley officials planning to move all nuclear casks this year

By RICK MILLER, Olean Times Herald | Posted: Thursday, January 28, 2016 9:30 am

ASHFORD HOLLOW — Since Nov. 10, four storage casks, each containing five steel containers with radioactive glass, have been moved to interim storage on a concrete pad at the West Valley Demonstration Project.

That leaves 52 casks with more than 250 10-foot high stainless steel canisters filled with glass to go before the storage cell in the Main Process Building is empty and can be decontaminated.

“We’d like to move them all this calendar year,” John Rendall, who is involved in regulatory strategy and engineering for site contractor CHBWV, told members of the West Valley Citizens Task Force during a monthly meeting Wednesday at the Ashford Office Complex.

Additional money will be allocated to moving the remaining vertical storage casks this year, Rendall said. That will probably include a second shift to speed up the process of remotely removing the canisters from the high-level room, placing them in storage casks and welding the lids. The 85-ton casks are then moved along a haul road to a concrete pad.

The casks, which are fabricated of steel and concrete on-site, will begin moving again in April, Rendall said. By June, officials hope to be moving two casks a week.

All high-level waste must be removed from the Main Process Building, where thousands of tons of spent nuclear fuel was recycled and processed in the 1960s and early 1970s. The building will then be demolished and excavated to get to the source of radioactive contamination in the groundwater below the plant.

Rendall said that among the material awaiting shipment off-site is the melter that was in the vitrification facility where highly radioactive liquid waste was transformed into radioactive glass that can’t leak. The melter, which is contaminated by radioactivity, will be shipped by truck and rail to a facility in Texas this fall.

Paul Bembia, West Valley director of the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, reported on results of the aerial radiological survey conducted in 2014 in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Energy. The survey covered 92 square miles and included the Cattaraugus Creek corridor all the way to Lake Erie.

The company Remote Sensing Labs was able to compare the results to earlier aerial surveys, Bembia said.

Five areas showed traces “slightly above background,” Bembia said. Soil samples were taken from those areas, three very close to the Western New York Nuclear Service Center in West Valley and two on the Seneca Nation of Indians’ Cattaraugus Territory.

More than 600 soil samples were taken at 200 locations, and half of those have been sent for analysis, Bembia said.

“We don’t yet have all the analytical results and radiological dose assessments,” he added.

Those results are expected soon, Bembia said. Officials will then meet with landowners to discuss the findings. The results will also be presented at a future West Valley Citizens Task Force meeting.

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