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City & Region

Wheatfield

Wheatfield landfill had twice as much Love Canal waste as expected 120-by-90 foot section targeted, worksite ends up almost reaching North Tonawanda city line

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WHEATFIELD – The removal of Love Canal waste from a town-owned landfill in Wheatfield has been completed, but there was twice as much waste as expected, Supervisor Robert B. Cliffe said at last week’s Town Board session.

When the Department of Environmental Conservation announced the plan in September, it said the target area was a 120-by-90-foot section of the former Niagara Sanitation landfill off Nash Road and Niagara Falls Boulevard. The worksite extended almost to the North Tonawanda city line, separated from the city by only a narrow National Grid right-of-way.

Records showed that about 1,600 cubic yards of waste was removed from the Love Canal dumpsite in Niagara Falls by Department of Transportation crews in 1968, during construction of the LaSalle Expressway. That was a decade before Love Canal became a national synonym for a toxic disaster area.

The waste removed during the highway project was reburied between June 6 and July 15, 1968, in a trench 100 feet long by 30 feet wide and 27 feet deep, the DOT records showed.

At the time, Niagara Sanitation Co. was operating the 20-acre landfill, which was taken over by the town and shut down that year.

The Love Canal waste pile was supposedly only 15 feet thick at the bottom of the trench, with 12 feet of dirt on top of it. But that’s not how things turned out.

Glenn Springs Holdings, the subsidiary of Occidental Chemical Co. that performed the removal, found the waste was up to 30 feet deep, Cliffe said.

“The amount of contaminated soil removed was approximately twice the amount originally estimated, which is not unusual for a site as old as this one,” DEC spokesman Peter Constantakes told The Buffalo News via email.

The work also took far longer than expected. Glenn Springs started in October and said it hoped to be done by Christmas. However, it soon found that its workers needed to clear massive amounts of brush from the site, and then the company had to construct a temporary road to support heavy equipment. Work was stopped during the harshest winter weather, with the company erecting a temporary shelter over the site to keep workers somewhat warm.

The waste was to be trucked to an incinerator near Sarnia, Ont., for destruction, but after a political outcry there, Glenn Springs decided to truck the waste to the CSX Transportation railroad station in Buffalo, and ship it by rail to incinerators owned by the Clean Harbors disposal firm in Kimball, Neb.

After the waste was removed, the crew filled in the hole.

Constantakes said the shelter's removal should be finished this week, followed by the removal of the staging area and the restoration of the site.

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