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DEC reclassifies Wheatfield landfill as significant threat to public health

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WHEATFIELD – The state Department of Environmental Conservation has reclassified a town-owned landfill as a significant threat to public health.

Monday's notice about the old Niagara Sanitation Co. landfill, off Nash Road near the North Tonawanda city line, cited the lack of a cap that meets modern regulations or a fence to keep people out of the site.

Supervisor Robert B. Cliffe said at Monday's Town Board meeting that the reclassification "makes absolutely no sense to me. They've taken the worst chemicals, and they're gone."

The 18.7-acre landfill was the scene of a cleanup from the fall of 2014 until this June, in which waste that originated at Love Canal was removed.

In June and July 1968, during the construction of the LaSalle Expressway in Niagara Falls, about 1,600 cubic yards of toxic waste was taken out of the Love Canal landfill by state Department of Transportation crews and buried at Niagara Sanitation. Later that year, the company closed and the town took possession of the landfill.

The Love Canal waste was supposedly buried in a trench 100 feet long, 30 feet wide and as deep as 27 feet below the surface. Old records showed that the waste was 15 feet thick, with 12 feet of dirt on top of it.

However, Glenn Springs Holdings, the Occidental Chemical Co. subsidiary that carried out the removal work, found that the waste was as much as 30 feet thick and that twice as much material as expected was removed and shipped to an incinerator in Nebraska.

Cliffe said the DEC reported that there was no off-site migration of waste. "Good old Wheatfield clay kept it there," Cliffe said.

But he said the DEC probably will want the town to pay for a fence around the landfill, which he estimated would be 7,000 feet long. "It's not going to be cheap," Cliffe said.

However, a DEC spokeswoman told The Buffalo News by email Tuesday that the department has not decided what the final remedy will be for the landfill, and hasn't decided on a fence.

Before it took Love Canal waste, Niagara Sanitation accepted municipal garbage as well as industrial

waste from such companies as Bell Aerospace, Carborundum, Frontier Chemical, Graphite Specialties, Continental Can and Grief Brothers, the DEC said in its announcement. Waste from the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station also was taken there.

The landfill contains cancer-causing PCBs as well as assorted caustic materials, pesticides, hydrocarbons and “plating tank sludge,” the DEC said.

During the recent project, much of the brush that covered the site was removed. The only impediment to entry is a small chain across an access road, town officials said. The DEC has asked for “no trespassing” signs to be posted.

Occidental, whose corporate predecessor, Hooker Chemical Co., was responsible for Love Canal, paid for this year’s project. But Cliffe said Oxy can’t be stuck with the bill for the town’s work “unless we have more proof that they have more material there.”

Efforts can be made to require some of the other dumpers to pay, but several of them are now defunct. “It will take a long time,” Cliffe said.

The DEC statement said the department will use Superfund money to carry out whatever solution it chooses and then pursue the responsible parties for reimbursement.

Some speakers at the Monday meeting said the landfill is too close to the proposed 23-home Aubrey Way subdivision for safety. That plan, put forward by the owners of Bob Weaver Motorsports, is pending before the town Planning Board.

“You put homes in and you’re sentencing people to death, lifetime irreversible illness,” resident Laurie Galbo asserted. The proposed subdivision is on property behind 3400 Niagara Falls Blvd., north of the landfill, with an access road to the homes to be built from Nash Road.

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