

Lundine Asks U.S. To Speed West Valley Recommendation

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By MARK SPANG

WEST VALLEY — Rep. Stanley N. Lundine has asked the federal Department of Energy to speed up its recommendation concerning the fate of the defunct Nuclear Fuel Services plant at West Valley.

The Jamestown Democrat's request came at an informational conference Saturday in West Valley where a DOE report was reviewed, which outlined options for the cleanup of the nuclear plant.

"I'm somewhat disappointed with this report," Lundine said. "It was my belief that this study would be a recommendation. I frankly don't see it as that."

The DOE plans to present the report to Congress Feb. 24 without a recommendation. According to the current DOE schedule, a recommendation will not be made by the secretary of energy until May 1.

"I don't want the 96th Congress to slip away when congressional action may be needed," Lundine added.

Lundine also explained that Congress may be asked to vote on authorization for the DOE to become involved in the West Valley cleanup. It may also be asked to appropriate funds.

A major portion of Saturday's discussion

centered on a leak that was recently discovered in a safety device which sits below a 580,000-gallon tank of high level radioactive waste.

The safety device is a pan that is capable of holding up to 20,000 gallons should the original carbon steel tank leak.

The leak was discovered earlier this month when test water was pumped into the pan. The tank itself does not leak. Nuclear Regulatory Commission officials have said. They have also noted that no radioactive waste has escaped.

Charles Haughney, who is assigned to the West Valley case by the NRC, said at the Saturday conference. "I would like to emphasize that the task of how to get the high level liquid waste out, must get underway. It (the defect) underscores that fact."

Haughney explained that below the pan is a concrete vault that should hold any liquid that escapes from the pan. He also said that the moisture of the clay around the vault is regulated by a water injection system so that the clay will be capable of holding in anything that might leak through the concrete vault.

Dr. Marvin Resnikoff, chairman of the Nuclear Subcommittee of the national Sierra Club, a conservationist group, commented to Haughney. "The defect to me sounds like a simple hole." He later added, "I think we must recognize that one of the safety barriers is lost."

When asked if the defect in the tank is impossible to repair, Haughney replied, "I don't know the answer to that question. Additional inspections need to be done."

Haughney also suggested that the cleanup of West Valley should be uncoupled from financial considerations.

The DOE study includes more than \$1 billion worth of suggestions for the decontamination and decommissioning of the Nuclear Fuel Services plant.

The options range from solidifying the waste and leaving it at West Valley to dismantling the entire Nuclear Fuel Services plant and shipping the waste to a nuclear waste repository.

It was noted at Saturday's meeting, however, that there currently is no repository for nuclear waste. The DOE report also recognizes that any cleanup at the site will involve the risk of radioactive exposure.

Nuclear Fuel Services used the plant for reprocessing nuclear reactor fuel from 1968-72. It halted reprocessing when federal regulations made the operation too expensive. The company, a subsidiary of Getty Oil, plans to exercise a clause in its contract with the state that will turn the plant back to the state in 1981.

A public hearing on the DOE report has been scheduled for Jan 13 at the Erie County Public Library in Buffalo's Lafayette Square.