

**Center for Health, Environment & Justice • Citizens' Environmental Coalition •  
Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes • Nuclear Information & Resource Service**

**NEWS RELEASE**

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**Contacts:**

Anne Rabe, CHEJ, 518-653-3843(c), annerabe@msn.com.  
Diane D'Arrigo, NIRS, 301-270-6477 X16, 202-841-8588 (c) dianed@nirs.org

**First-Ever Study by Economists & Scientists Reveals True Costs of Nuclear Waste;  
Leaving Waste Buried Onsite Can Cost Over \$27 Billion While Endangering Public  
Health and Great Lakes for Tens of Thousands of Years.**

**State-Funded Study Finds Waste Excavation Cleanup Presents the Least Risk to a  
Large Population and the Lowest Cost; Has National Implications for Proposed  
Reprocessing Facilities and Reactors.**

(Buffalo, NY) Economists and scientists released a first-ever study today on the long-term cleanup costs for the West Valley nuclear waste site, located 30 miles south of Buffalo, NY. *The Real Costs of Cleaning Up Nuclear Waste: A Full Cost Accounting of Cleanup Options for the West Valley Nuclear Waste Site*, investigated the costs of digging up radioactive waste versus leaving waste buried onsite for the first 1,000 years. (The wastes will be dangerously radioactive for tens of thousands of years). The study revealed leaving buried waste at the site is both high risk and expensive while a waste excavation cleanup presents the least risk to a large population and the lowest cost.

Over 1000 years, waste excavation costs \$9.9 billion while leaving buried waste onsite 8i9costs between \$13 and \$27 billion, depending on whether a catastrophic release occurs or not. The study authors found onsite buried waste inadequately protects public health due to serious erosion problems, and poses a risk to residents if controls fail and dangerous radioactive waste pollutes Lake Erie. This is the first time a full cost accounting approach has been applied to a waste site cleanup. Environmental groups urged that the full economic, environmental and public health consequences of this nuclear reprocessing waste site showed the true costs that should be considered in relation to proposed nuclear reprocessing plants and reactors. The study was funded by the state of New York, through a grant sponsored by Senator Catharine Young (R-Olean), and was conducted by Synapse Energy Economics, Tufts University, SUNY Fredonia and Radioactive Waste Management Assoc.

*William Steinhurst, Ph.D., Senior Consultant at Synapse Energy Economics, Inc.* stated "The presence of long-lived radioactive wastes at the West Valley site requires that we, as a society, make choices that recognize the risks and costs imposed on our children, grandchildren and future generations. Looking out even over the next 1000 years shows that leaving buried waste onsite is the more expensive choice by many billions of dollars, and is also the more risky choice for residents of Cattaraugus County and its neighbors along Lake Erie. The Department of Energy and state agencies should explore options for retrievable, monitored, above-ground storage of nuclear waste at a more stable site. In any new study, they should rigorously and with public input address the difficulty of maintaining effective security and erosion controls at the site over a period five times the age of our nation. Their current study contains only the barest skeleton of a budget for those controls,

and that is only for 200 years. On top of that, those costs are treated in a way that assumes those costs for future generations are, in effect, of no importance."

*Michael P. Wilson, Ph.D., Professor of Geosciences at SUNY Fredonia* said, "The nuclear wastes at West Valley, radioactive for tens of thousands of years, will be consumed by erosion and discharged downstream to Lakes Erie and Ontario in less than 3,000 years and may be dangerously exposed in less than 200 or 300 years as evidenced by formation of gullies, retreat of plateau edges, reshaping of stream profiles, observations of soil cracks and groundwater seepage, and upstream migration of waterfalls in the gullies."

*Marvin Resnikoff, Ph.D., Senior Associate, Radioactive Waste Management Associates,* stated, "The site has a very large inventory of radioactive materials. It almost goes without saying that when taken into the body, these materials can cause cancer. Our assessment is that without careful cleanup, these materials will be released from the site and can enter Cattaraugus Creek and Lake Erie, causing a large number of cancers and other health effects."

*Judith Einach, Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes,* said "Members of the Coalition have been watch-dogging this site and running interference for over 30 years. As New Yorkers we are burdened by having to pay both state and federal tax dollars on this nuclear waste. We are further burdened by having to continually worry about whether smart decisions will be made for the site. We have had to take the DOE to court at our own expense. It is time for DOE to commit to doing whatever it takes to fully clean up the West Valley nuclear site and repair the damage done to our environment.

*Diane D'Arrigo, Nuclear Information and Resource Service,* said "New Yorkers now have six months to give their input on the final disposition of the West Valley nuclear waste site. Based on the site geology and radioactive hazards explained in this report, the decision to dig it up must be made *now* before the radioactivity oozes and leaks closer to our drinking water and contaminates more soil, fish, game, crops, recreational areas and wildlife. The economics are consistent with the moral arguments to dig it up. If we leave long-lasting radioactive waste in eroding ground, knowing it will escape into waterways and the environment, we are abandoning our responsibility to future generations.

*Anne Rabe, Center for Health, Environment & Justice,* said "The federal and state agencies need to heed the findings of this important study. Leaving waste buried at West Valley is dangerous for future generations and extremely costly. It is time for the agencies to move quickly to select a cleanup method. Clearly, waste excavation is the only way to remediate the West Valley site so that we protect our health and the Great Lakes environment."

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