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T R A N S M I T T A L

to: Margot Anderson, PO-2  
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Todd Jackson, NRC  
Marsha Keister, BBWI  
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James Owendoff, DOE-HQ  
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Mark Rawlings, DOE  
Ambrose Schwallie, WGS  
Dennis Seipp, WGS

chad

re: The Olean Times Herald; Sunday, September 16, 2001; "Concerns over radiation exposure often misplaced" (Letter to the Editor)

The Olean Times Herald; Tuesday, September 18, 2001; Display ad for Monthly Public Tours of the WVDP

The Buffalo News; Wednesday, September 18, 2001; "Attacks delay shipments of West Valley N-waste"

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# Concerns over radiation exposure often misplaced

By MARY GEORGE

This is in response to two recent letters to the editor concerning the shipment of radioactive materials through Olean. We live in a radioactive world. There are many natural sources of radiation which have been present since the earth was formed. Some of these materials are ingested with food and water, while others, such as radon, are inhaled.

For an average person, the naturally occurring sources contribute about four to five times as much to one's exposure to radiation as the human-made sources. Natural sources include cosmic radiation, natural radionuclides such as potassium that emanate from our bodies and sources in the earth's crusts (soil, water, vegetation). Some of us are exposed to radon gas, a current health concern, occurring from the decay of natural uranium in soil. The average

## READERS' TURN TO WRITE

American receives 360 millirems of radiation each year, 300 from natural sources and 60 from man-made activities.

Man-made sources of radiation include consumer products such as TVs, some smoke detectors, lantern mantles, building materials, combustible fuels (gas, coal, etc.), tobacco and the shipment of radioactive materials. By far, the most significant source of man-made radiation exposure to the public is from medical procedures, such as diagnostic x-rays (40 mrem per year), nuclear medicine and radiation therapy (14 mrem/yr.).

Yes, we can assess and limit the risks of radiation exposure to ourselves and our children. We can choose our hometown

and live in cities of low elevation. We can also live outside a 50-mile perimeter of a nuclear power plant, which adds 0.009 mrem/yr. to our exposure. We may be more wise, however, to live outside a perimeter of a coal-fired electrical utility plant, which adds .03 mrem/yr. to our exposure. We have little control over our children going to school, working or living in a stone, brick or concrete building, but we can limit their travel on jet planes, we can skip the gas lantern mantles when we take them camping, we can use our own discretion in limiting their exposure to diagnostic x-rays and we can certainly educate them to brush their teeth so they don't have to receive porcelain crowns or false teeth in their later years.

We may be just as wise to spend our time stressing the negative health effects to our adolescents from radiation exposure that occurs when smoking,

which adds an estimated 1,300 mrem/yr. due to radon decay products.

About three million shipments of radioactive materials are made each year by highway, railroad, aircraft and ship. No deaths or serious injuries have ever been attributed to the radioactive nature of any material involved in a transportation accident. It may be beyond the control of Olean residents at this time to go to the beach on the day of the shipment of radioactive materials because the public doesn't know the date. However, regardless of when that occurs, we can certainly exercise good common sense and make our children aware of the very obvious, real danger of playing next to railroad tracks, which has nothing to do with shipments of radioactive materials.

*(Ms. George lives in Olean.)*

o/k

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## Attacks delay shipment of West Valley N-wastes

By JOHN F. BONFATTI

*News Staff Reporter*

Plans for a rail shipment of nuclear wastes from the West Valley Demonstration Project have been put on hold indefinitely following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington.

John Chamberlain, a spokesman for the project, confirmed Tuesday that the day after the attacks, federal Energy Department officials in Washington announced a halt to all shipments of nuclear materials, including West Valley's shipment of 125 highly radioactive nuclear waste fuel rods.

"In light of what happened, the DOE is evaluating a lot of activities and certainly shipping of any nuclear material," he said.

"My assumption is that when it begins again, it will go on a case-by-case basis."

The proposed shipment was believed to be the largest commercial nuclear fuel shipment in U.S. history.

Because of security concerns, officials weren't releasing a date for the shipment, but the West

Valley Project had been planning on completing the five-day journey before Oct. 31, the day the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission's certificate for compliance for the shipment ends.

"It has to be in Idaho by the end of October," Chamberlain said, acknowledging that, with the postponement, "our time is getting short."

Two specially designed casks containing the waste were to be placed on rail cars and transported through 11 states to a temporary destination, the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory in Idaho Falls.

The \$16 million shipment, which involved planning and negotiating with the states and with the four railroads that were to carry it, was to have gone through Butler, Pa.; Youngstown, Ohio; Fort Wayne, Ind.; Springfield, Ill.; Kansas City; Topeka, Kan.; Kearney, Neb.; Julesburg, Colo.; Cheyenne, Wyo.; and Pocatello, Idaho, before reaching the laboratory.

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