



The League of Women Voters of New York State
62 Grand Street, Albany, New York 12207
Phone: 518-465-4162 Fax: 518-465-0812
www.lwvny.org E-Mail: lwvny@lwvny.org

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS *of New York State*

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Wednesday, August 26, 2009

CONTACT: LEE LAMBERT
716-652-8173

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS SUPPORTS FULL CLEAN-UP OF WEST VALLEY NUCLEAR WASTE SITE

The League of Women Voters of New York State (League) has submitted comments to the United States Department of Energy (DOE) asking for full exhumation of the radioactive and chemical contaminants at the West Valley nuclear waste site located in the town of Ashford, 35 miles south of Buffalo.

The draft environmental impact statement, released by the DOE on November 25, 2008, proposed bifurcated cleanup or “phased decision-making,” whereby one source of contaminants would be removed immediately while other sources, including a radioactive plume, underground tanks, and two unlined burial sites, would be monitored, with decisions regarding potential future cleanup deferred for up to thirty years. The League opposes this approach for three reasons: it poses an unacceptable risk for a precious and arguably scarce resource – the area’s future water supply; it ignores the most economically sensible option; and, by deferring of a major portion of cleanup, it removes cleanup from the public scrutiny that the EIS process was enacted to promote.

The League’s president Betsey Swan stated, upon filing the comments in opposition to bifurcated cleanup, “The DOE approach is appropriate neither from a scientific nor an economic standpoint. Moreover, it removes from public scrutiny future decisions regarding waste that will remain radioactive for thousands of generations.” Ms. Swan noted that the West Valley site was subject to high precipitation and aggressive erosion, rendering it unsuitable for storage of hazardous chemical and or radioactive waste underground. Nevertheless, the DOE proposes to leave such radioactive waste in the ground indefinitely, posing a danger to both local water supplies and the great lakes basin. Such storage could result in contamination of the water system for millions of people in New York State, eastern Canada, and the St. Lawrence region.

The League’s position is supported by a state-funded study, *The Real Costs of Cleaning Up Nuclear Waste (A Full Cost Accounting of Cleanup Options for the West Valley Nuclear Waste Site)*, which concluded that, in the long term, leaving buried waste on site is high-risk and expensive, while full cleanup presents both decreased risk and cost.

In filing its opposition to limited cleanup, the League reasserted two basic beliefs of the organization: that public participation of citizens in governmental decision-making is a vital part of a democracy; and that the protection of public health and safety, and of the environment, is paramount in a civilized society.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that has worked for over ninety years to encourage informed and active participation in government, to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and to influence public policy through education and advocacy. Membership is open to all men and women who care about citizen involvement in our democratic institutions.