

# Community LOOW Project Update

February 2007

This two-year project, initiated in 2005, was created to address a complex history of contamination at the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works with equally complicated government supervision, and a legacy of mistrust. The Niagara County Department of Health developed this initiative in collaboration with members of the community, elected officials, agencies, and the University at Buffalo to address public concerns about the LOOW site. The Community LOOW Project intends to consolidate relevant information from the entire 7,500 acre area to enable independent review of site activities and identify “data gaps”. The Niagara County Department of Health is administering the project in its non-regulatory position and remains committed to making a positive contribution to the assessment of the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works property.

The project began with firm financial support from the Towns of Porter and Lewiston, Niagara County, State Sen. Maziarz, Assemblywoman DelMonte, the WNY State Delegation and the University at Buffalo. In August 2005, a generous \$30,000 contribution from the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo added to a unique and diverse group of supporters, whose generous financial assistance has made this worthwhile project possible.

In September 2005, we sent letters to individuals, companies and landowners requesting cooperation and information concerning the LOOW, and held our first public meeting in November 2005. We have received responsive information from NYSDEC, the US Army Corps of Engineers, US National Guard, US Air Force, CWM Chemical Services, Modern Landfill, USEPA and some individuals, for which we are appreciative.

Collection of information has been ongoing. There has been an immense amount of work carried out at the LOOW over the past 65 years. Reviewing historical information is a key component of our efforts so that we can appropriately assess current investigations, past cleanups and identify “data gaps”. Significant effort has been spent getting a good understanding of what has been done at the site and what information is available. Documents have been reviewed and we have begun requesting review comments from experts on various scientific aspects of the environmental investigations.

A pilot-stage development of a Geographic Information System (GIS) and mapping through a significant in-kind contribution from the Environment and Society Institute, University at Buffalo (Dr. Joseph Gardella and Ms. Gunwha Oh) was conducted in 2005. This produced examples of maps showing the distribution of various contaminants in soil, water and groundwater at the LOOW using three disparate electronic databases provided by USACE and Lew-Port school district, and enabled us to make some development decisions concerning the GIS.

In March 2006, Congresswoman Slaughter announced a \$100,000 federal allocation to the Niagara County Department of Health toward the Community LOOW Project. This generous funding composes one half of our budget and will enable the project to proceed with creation of a geographic information system (GIS) and to retain expert reviewers to assist our data gap analysis.

Following final award of the federal grant money (October 2006) we were able to pursue contracting with a GIS firm with expertise in environmental applications. With support of the Niagara County GIS initiative, the Community LOOW Project was identified as a key element in the county’s request for proposals. Ecology & Environment, Inc. of Lancaster, NY was awarded the contract in

January 2007 and a kickoff meeting of the CLP GIS was held on January 30, 2007. E&E will develop a GIS for use by the project team, reviewers and interested community members through the internet.

We are now in a position to move forward and retain additional subject matter experts to act as reviewers and provide opinions regarding the status of investigation and remedial work at the former LOOW.

Communication with the public remains an important part of our work. Occasional telephone calls are received from the public requesting information, and Project Coordinator Scott King has observed restoration advisory board (RAB) meetings. A second public meeting held in September 2006 attracted a large crowd and included a demonstration of the GIS and how it could be used in our project. A third public meeting will be held soon.

A simple website has been enabled so that members of the community can learn more about this project. The website can be reached through the Niagara County Department of Health website (URL is <http://www.niagaracounty.com/health>) under the "Hot Topics" banner.

We will continue to interact with the US Army Corps of Engineers and their Restoration Advisory Board, landowners, and other community groups. We see opportunities in the creation of our GIS that may make this database relevant to all major landowners on the LOOW.

In the near-term, the GIS will be developed with the goal of being operational by May 2007. Analysis and report preparation will then continue with production of a report during summer 2007.