

State Picks Radioactive Dump Site

By JONATHAN TURNER

The state's first low-level radioactive waste disposal facility will be located either in one of two sites in the north central town of Ellington or at a nearby location on the East Windsor-South Windsor town line.

After two years of studying about 900 possible sites, the Connecticut Hazardous Waste Management Service board of directors met for 10 hours last weekend in Farmington and narrowed its search down to the three candidate sites, which were announced Monday.

Anita Baxter, public affairs specialist for the CHWMS, said that the sites were chosen through a "blind" selection process, whereby detailed information was gathered about various unidentified parcels of land throughout the state. No actual tests were done on any site and the board was kept unaware of the locations of the sites, in order to make the process as fair as possible, she said.

"I think it's terrible," Gary Pontelandolfo of Norfolk, a member of the environmental group Don't Waste Connecticut, said of the process. "I don't think anywhere should have been picked. It's a tragedy that we have this waste to begin with."

Charlene LaVoie, a community lawyer in Winsted who has helped a number of Litchfield County towns draft local radioactive waste bans,

speculated that opposition to the facility in Northwestern Connecticut—compared to little such opposition in the area of the chosen sites, may have affected the siting decision.

"It's a great coincidence that all three sites are clustered together," she said.

But Joseph Cohen, a spokesman for the CHWMS, said that "opposition groups take themselves far too seriously. They believe their impact is far greater than it really is. They had absolutely no influence on our decision."

"We were fully prepared to accept the naming of sites in any part of the state," he said.

And Ms. Baxter said that "given the kinds of soils and geology that we were looking for in a site, that it's appropriate that they're each within a reasonable distance of one another."

Mital Bowman of New Haven, a coordinator of Don't Waste Connecticut, objected to the selection of these sites—all just northeast of Hartford and within 10 miles of each other—because the area "is highly populated, heavily traveled and the transportation of this waste will go through the most populated part of the state."

According to the CHWMS site selection plan, a preferred site for the radioactive waste dump should be from 160 to 250 acres in size; isolated from sources of drinking water; not in an area of high population density; and able to accommodate safe transportation access. The site should be one that would have minimal impact on land uses and environmental resources, the CHWMS stipulated.

Ms. Baxter said that the final site selection report, which includes information on the candidate sites, will be released later this month.

Joseph Cohen, another CHWMS spokesman, said that each of the three sites are in agricultural areas that met the greatest number of standards set for site selection. The East Windsor-South Windsor site is 470 acres; one Ellington site is 243 acres and the other is 238 acres.

"This is the most fair, responsible method we could use," he said. "It was a very difficult task to choose the site without creating unnecessary public concern in the towns. The best thing we could do was keep the site locations as secret as possible."

The CHWMS will have each of the

sites tested for the next three or four months and expects to name a preferred site for the facility by early 1992, Ms. Baxter said.

An application to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to build the facility will be filed in mid-1992 and approvals for construction must also be received from the Connecticut Siting Council, the Department of Environmental Protection and local zoning boards, she said.

Land for the site will be acquired by the state Department of Public Works through purchase or condemnation. Paid for by the waste generators, which include nuclear power plants, hospitals and universities, the facility is expected to be operational by 1996, Ms. Baxter said.

Although several towns have enacted anti-nuclear waste regulations and ordinances seeking to prohibit the storage or disposal of such waste, she said that Federal and state law would override any local law.

The disposal facility, which will be designed to take the state's low-level radioactive waste for the next 50 years, will consist of concrete steel-reinforced vaults covered by an earthen bunker to be built on the ground's surface or just below grade, Ms. Baxter said.

Adding that the facility will be electronically monitored and that the facility operator will pay for water testing at the site, Mr. Cohen said that this is far safer than storing radioactive waste at its point of generation, which many environmental groups support.

"Keeping the waste on site is probably the most dangerous thing we can do in terms of addressing this as an environmental problem," he said. "It wouldn't be proper for permanent disposal and it would be keeping waste at 30 locations rather than one extremely carefully planned and monitored facility."

Although Litchfield County escaped being named as a potential facility site, Ms. LaVoie said that "it's not at all a relief. The greater issue is still there. The facility will be outdated at some time and if we continue to generate waste, there'll be a need for another facility."

"We're going to get more of these sites within our lifetime," she said. "This is not going to go away until we deal with the underlying problem" of dependence on nuclear energy.