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The **New York Times****March** 18, 2004 Thursday  
Late Edition - Final**SECTION:** Section A; Column 3; Metropolitan Desk; Pg. 1**LENGTH:** 1169 words**HEADLINE:** Love Canal Declared Clean, Ending Toxic Horror**BYLINE:** By ANTHONY DePALMA; David Staba, in Niagara Falls, contributed reporting for this article.**BODY:**

Two decades after Love Canal became the first polluted site on the newly created Superfund list, federal officials announced yesterday that the neighborhood that epitomized environmental horror in the late 1970's was clean enough to be taken off the list.

Hundreds of families were evacuated from the working-class Love Canal section of Niagara Falls, N.Y., after deadly chemicals started oozing through the ground into basements and a school, burning children and pets and, according to experts, causing birth defects and miscarriages. The neighborhood had been built on a 19th-century canal where a toxic mix of more than 80 industrial chemicals had been buried.

The removal of Love Canal from the Superfund list will be mostly symbolic. The cleanup at the **toxic waste** site, the nation's most notorious, took 21 years and cost close to \$400 million, but most of the work was completed a few years ago.

Still, the proposal by the federal Environmental Protection Agency to take the area off the list of the worst environmental disasters represented a significant milestone for the agency, which was in its infancy when the cleanup began.

And for E.P.A. officials, who have been criticized for their handling of the World Trade Center cleanup and have had to battle for funds to maintain programs that have run into opposition from Republicans and corporate interests, the formal end to the Love Canal cleanup was welcome news.

"This is a historic time," said Jane M. Kenny, the federal agency's regional administrator, who said that she called the site's supervisors yesterday morning to congratulate them. "The good news here that needs to be told is that we

now have a vibrant area that's been revitalized, people living in a place where they feel happy, and it's once again a nice neighborhood."

Industrial chemicals dumped into the partly completed canal by the Hooker Chemical Company from 1947 to 1952 have been removed or contained in one area that was lined with impermeable materials and capped by clay. A drainage system collects water runoff and treats it.

About 260 homes north of the canal have been renovated and sold to new owners, and about 150 acres east of the canal have been sold to commercial developers for light industrial uses.

Ms. Kenny said that even when Love Canal is removed from the cleanup list, the agency would not walk away from the neighborhood or the tons of toxic material that still lie buried in a fenced-off area there.

"There comes a time when you say that now, yeah, the work is done," she said, "but we're going to continue to monitor what goes on there."

But for some of those whose lives have been shaped by the long, unpleasant history of Love Canal, the government's decision seems more like political opportunism than good science.

"Nothing is different from what it was five years ago except that the E.P.A. needs to look good," said Lois Marie Gibbs, a former resident of Love Canal who originally organized her neighbors to demand a cleanup.

She is now executive director of the Center for Health, Environment and Justice, an organization that works with communities facing environmental problems.

Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, who has criticized the federal environmental agency for the way it reacted to concerns about air pollution at the trade center site, said that she welcomed the announcement that parts of the neighborhood had been restored but that declaring victory was premature.

"While Love Canal marked the beginning of the Superfund, its successful cleanup should, by no means, mark its demise," she said in a statement. "We still have a long way to go."

The federal agency will take public comments for 30 days on its proposal to remove Love Canal and two other sites in western New York from the list, but there is little doubt they will be removed.

The tremendous size and awful scope of the problem at Love Canal led President Jimmy Carter to declare environmental emergencies in 1978 and 1980.

The image of **toxic wastes** bubbling up from the ground shocked people across the country, and in 1980 directly spurred Congress to pass the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, which came to be known as Superfund.

The law provided for the establishment of a priority list of dirty sites, and created a mechanism for the cleanups to be paid for by the companies that created them. A "polluter pays" tax was also set up to pay for cleanups at abandoned hazardous waste sites.

That tax expired in 1995, and Democrats in the Senate have tried to reinstate it. The most recent effort was last week, when the bill, opposed by the Bush administration, was defeated, 53-43.

Since the Superfund was started in 1983, 300 sites have been delisted, said Ms. Kenny of the E.P.A., and work is progressing on many others. "When you think about the fact that there are 1,200 sites on the current national priorities list, and work is going on at a majority of sites, with 900 substantially completed, that shows real progress," she said.

The E.P.A. also plans to remove two other sites in western New York from the Superfund list: the 22-acre former landfill on 102nd Street in Niagara Falls owned by the Occidental Chemical Corporation and the Olin Chemical Corporation, and a 65-acre former county dump in Wheatfield, just north of the Niagara River.

Work on Love Canal was overseen by the federal agency, while New York State established the Love Canal Area Revitalization Agency, which refurbished some of the homes and sold them to new owners willing to move back into the area north of Love Canal, now renamed Black Creek Village. When that agency formally went out of business in August, the neighborhood held a street party.

Craig Rice, 49, grew up in the Love Canal neighborhood and watched his father die there from a rare brain **cancer**. He lives near the site of one of the schools that had to be demolished because chemicals were seeping into the buildings, giving off hazardous fumes.

He questioned whether it was a good idea to keep so many chemicals buried on 70 acres in the neighborhood, even if they are capped by a thick layer of clay and surrounded by an eight-foot fence. But he said he felt secure knowing that monitors would pick up any problems.

"I definitely feel like it's under control," Mr. Craig said.

Five years ago, Eric Bluff, 31, bought one of the houses near Love Canal that had been restored. He was well aware of area's toxic history, having grown up just a few blocks away. He remembers how desolated it looked after 950 families had to be evacuated from a 10-block area surrounding the canal.

"I remember going through here with my parents and all the houses being vacant -- it looked like a ghost town," Mr. Bluff said as he was blowing the snow from the sidewalk outside his ranch house. He and his wife, Christina, were happy to hear that the government considers the area to be clean.

"It's a real nice neighborhood," he said. "I have no worries."

**URL:** <http://www.nytimes.com>

**GRAPHIC:** Photos: A lot where a home once stood in the Love Canal area of Niagara Falls, N.Y., after yesterday's snowfall. Some homes were refurbished and resold. (Photo by Joe Traver)  
(Photo by Dan Cappellazzo for The New York Times)(pg. B7)Map of New York State highlighting Love Canal: Signs, left, in 1978 warned of the pollution danger from chemical fumes and seepage in the Love Canal area. It was the nation's first Superfund site. (pg. B7)

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