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# THE BUFFALO NEWS

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## EVERYBODY'S COLUMN

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### Geological failures took a toll at West Valley site

As a retired civil engineer, only recently taking time to learn in depth about the West Valley nuclear site, I am grateful to Dr. Gordon Connally for giving us valuable historical detail on how the site was chosen in the early 1960s (Another voice, May 18).

After reviewing the design in 1962, the Atomic Energy Commission found that the facility would not function reliably or efficiently. It was built anyway, and there have been many failures that produced a highly contaminated site. Geology is thus only one factor in the future performance of the site.

Over the past 50 years, two significant geological failures have occurred. Groundwater migrating through the "tight" glacial till from a strontium spill under the process plant has formed a radioactive plume that threatens nearby creeks. (Sand lenses deposited by the glaciers also allow rapid groundwater flow.)

The second failure was a landslide in an August 2009 rainstorm that brought the edge of the plateau 15 feet closer to the unlined burial trenches. Extreme storms, sharply increasing the frequency and intensity of "hundred-year storms," are a feature of climate change not foreseen in the early 1960s.

Observing the glacial pace at which taxpayers/decision-makers have been willing to fund cleanup of the site does not lead me to share Dr. Connally's optimism about "quick response" in the detection and mitigation of radioactive leaks over thousands of years.

WILLIAM H. TOWNSEND,  
PH.D., P.E.

*Snyder*