

OPINION

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A chain-link fence is all that separates homes in Tonawanda from a landfill containing radioactive waste, as Sen. Charles Schumer pointed out this week. (John Hickey/Buffalo News)

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the cleanup. Too much time has been spent in endless process.

The landfill is bordered by Hackett, Military Road, the Youngmann Highway and Two Mile Creek Road. Many decades ago, when little was known about the dangers, kids played on the landfill and swam nearby.

The worrisome situation wasn't uncovered until the early 1990s when the federal Department of Energy conducted a radiological survey of the site. Even back then the agency concluded that radiation was above the level required for remediation.

The left-behind waste from the Manhattan Project, which developed the atomic bomb during World War II, has been the target of an alphabet soup of agencies over the years, each placing responsibility elsewhere. Lost in the conversation was the human factor, the residents who have continued to live with this threat to their health.

Schumer's push for more funding for the federal program that remediates radioactive sites is key to easing the concerns of residents, those living near the Tonawanda landfill as well as the other four sites in Western New York where the Corps of Engineers has started work under the Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program.

Such work must have appropriate funding, and the corps received \$6.5 million to work on the nearby Linde site on East Park Drive in fiscal year 2013 and \$3.6 million for the Niagara Falls Storage site. But the corps received a mere \$700,000 for the Tonawanda landfill as part of a nearly \$100 million national program.

The corps has acknowledged the growing risk of delaying cleanup. A few years ago, it determined that the health risks "are within acceptable limits for the current site conditions." However, the corps update stated that "risks could potentially increase over acceptable limits in the future, if the surface of the landfill is allowed to erode over time."

That must not be allowed to happen. The work of removing radioactive waste from the Tonawanda landfill has dragged on for too many years. We hope that the right amount of pressure applied by Schumer will finally change that, for the sake of long-suffering residents.

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