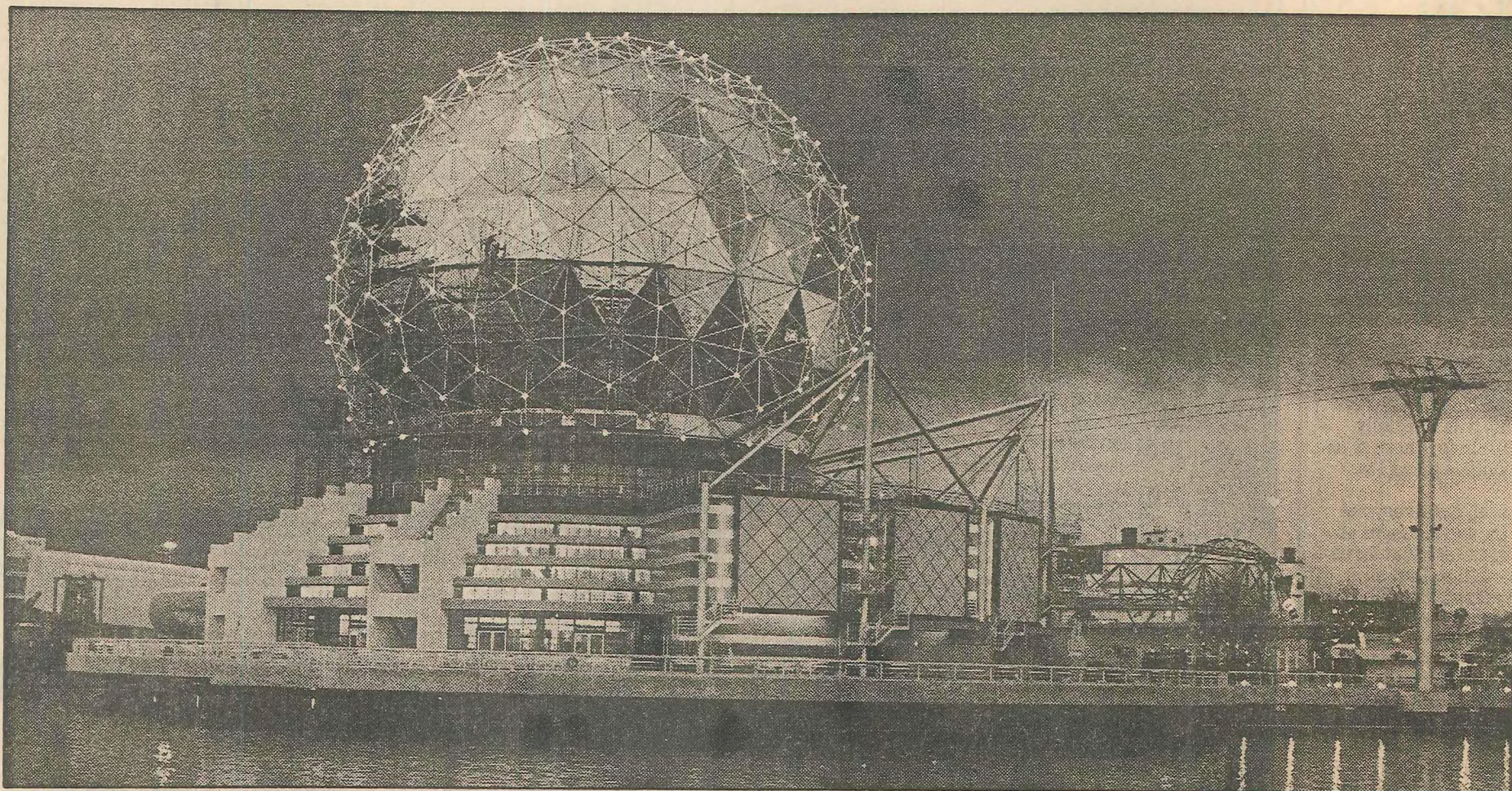


## THE NATION



TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

**BETTER DAYS:** The waterfront area of Expo '86 when the fair was in full swing. Now glitz is gone and the site is a nightmare of toxic waste.

By Kathleen Kenna Toronto Star

VANCOUVER — The ugly wasteland left along the waterfront after Expo '86 has become an environmental nightmare.

Rubble and garbage, strewn across the barren site, are a public embarrassment following the glitz of the world fair.

But the junk underground is far worse.

Land that was reclaimed from an old industrial patch is full of toxic wastes so plentiful they might fill a chemist's dictionary.

Ammonia, benzene, chromium, coal-tar wastes, heavy metals, lead and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) are part of the nasty brew that is polluting the soil and seeping into nearby False Creek.

Many of these are known or suspected carcinogens and some are in amounts exceeding provincial or federal environmental standards.

Scraping away the poisoned earth and trucking it to a special disposal site in Oregon is estimated to cost about \$500 million.

The province, which sold the site to Hong Kong billionaire Li Ka-shing for \$320 million, has accepted responsibility for the clean-up and opted for a \$22 million scheme.

While some "hot spots" in other parts of the 83-hectare (204-acre) site would still need to be dug up and taken away, the preferred plan for the worst eight-hectare (20-acre) parcel is to build containment walls, spread non-toxic soil over the rotten stuff, top this with a tough plastic or concrete barrier, and maybe jazz up the ground layer with artificial turf.

And what would one expect to build there later?

If you guessed light industry or warehouses or a car lot, think green.

# Poison Park -- the grim legacy of Expo '86

The site that scientists warn isn't good enough for houses, offices or even a child's wading pool is to become a park.

Once capped, the poisons will be dangerous enough that engineers don't want to risk building anything below ground, such as a swimming pool or a basement for a park caretaker's cottage, that would release chemical gases.

While the rest of Li's International Village will be a mini-city with schools, condos, office towers and shops, the park will likely never have more than playing fields and open green space. Even trees will be planted in a way that prevents their roots from reaching the mess.

Poison Park is what some residents are calling it.

But every health or environmental expert worth his or her government pay cheque insists the park will be safe after the clean-up.

"Driving an automobile is much more risky," says Vancouver's deputy medical health officer, Shaun Peck. The risk will be "56,000 times less than smoking a pack of cigarettes every day for life."

The benzene levels will be no higher

than they are in the middle of lovely Stanley Park, Peck told city council this week. And coal wastes will pose no more danger than the creosote oozing from backyard fenceposts, he said.

Social worker Pat Wilson says the park will be virtually useless. "I don't know when we've ever accepted such a substandard piece of property for the public.

"These are very serious levels of contamination they're talking about. If it's not safe enough to have someone live on that site, what makes it safe for casual use?"

Wilson, a commissioner on Vancouver's seven-member park board, has balked at the board's acceptance of the park plan and has demanded an independent, public inquiry, preferably chaired by a judge and not anyone connected with government or its consultants.

Dozens of consultants from Canada and the United States have done field studies and continue to work on the clean-up plan. Their recommendations have been reviewed by dozens more consultants, government experts, medical doctors and politicians.

So much study has gone into the mop-up since last fall that neither the

consultants nor provincial officials involved could estimate this week how much it has all cost so far.

The environment ministry has budgeted \$10 million for the project until March, 1990.

Once the toxic garbage is capped, the health or safety risk will be "almost zero," promises environmental engineer Richard Reis, project director for the multi-firm Soils Remediation Group, overseeing the clean-up. "You can't say zero anywhere in downtown Vancouver, but this will be so darn close. It's going to be completely safe."

Still, this is the first project of its kind in British Columbia, and some of the consultants' calculations are based more on theory than practice.

The province had to adopt new environmental standards for public protection from soil contamination to deal with the site, and is expanding these for the rest of B.C.

The standards rank among the toughest in the world, based on "worst case possible" studies, say provincial environment ministry officials.

Vancouver Alderman Libby Davies, part of a three-member reform group at the 11-member city council, says she's not satisfied.

"I'm no expert, so I guess I have to believe these guys," she says. "But I still have a lot of questions."

Among them is the troubling warning from city manager Fritz Bowers — who supports the park scheme — that the province isn't willing to guarantee total protection against future complications, such as tougher federal environmental standards or a breakdown in the containment system.

A public hearing has been set for June 22 to hear what potential park users have to say about Poison Park.