

Canadians Fight Dump Near Ottawa River

By Lindsay Potter

In January, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission amended the operating license for the Canada Nuclear Laboratories’ (CNL) Chalk River site authorizing construction of a “near surface disposal facility” to hold one million cubic meters of radioactive waste one kilometer from the Ottawa River, drinking water source for more than ten million people. The proposed NSDF is seven stories high and larger than 70 NHL hockey rinks.

The “low-level radioactive waste” destined for burial includes contaminated building materials, soil, equipment, tools, etc. The site, near Deep River, Ontario, upriver from Ottawa and Montreal, is unceded Anishinabeg Algonquin Nation territory. The Ottawa River has been a sacred and vital waterway for First Nations for thousands of years.

The NSDF is described as an “earthen mound” containing twelve disposal “cells,” each to be lined and covered. The proposal also includes systems for collecting leachate, detecting leaks, monitoring, as well as other infrastructure for treating wastewater and cleaning trucks, workstations, and personnel.

Once construction is finished, the commission must grant CNL an additional license before it begins burying radioactive waste in the facility. The NSDF is projected to operate for 50 years, followed by a 30-year “closure phase” and a 300-year “post-closure phase,” wrapping up in 2400.

The commission says the project “is not likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects,” but there is already a long list of radioactive contamination at the site, affecting the groundwater, tributaries — including Perch Lake and Perch Creek — and wetlands that feed into the Ottawa River. The licensing process has been riddled with complexities.

Opposition by First Nations, Environmentalists, and Other Local Leaders

Of the eleven Algonquin groups in the area, ten expressed strong opposition to the NSDF, citing concerns for the safety of the waters of Kichi Zibi (the Algonquin name for the Ottawa River), health risks

to people and wildlife, violation of treaty obligations and sacred sites, lack of prior and informed consent, and industry influence over the commission.

Dozens of mayors with the Montreal Metropolitan Community as well as 140 other municipalities in Ontario and Quebec oppose the project. Maja Vodanovic, mayor of the Lachine borough in Montreal, told CBC News, “Nuclear energy is not clean energy ... Yes, it doesn’t produce the [same] greenhouse gas effects like oil, but it creates very dangerous waste.” The Canadian Museum of Nature also denounced the NSDF over concerns it could harm two endangered species living in the watershed.

Though the commission maintains it consulted Indigenous groups in accordance with requirements under Canadian and international law, Algonquin leaders are pursuing further legal action, citing treaty violations. Lance Haymond, chief of Kebaowek First Nation, told CBC, “We are very fearful that in 10, 15, 20 years, this project will continue to pose a risk ... to all Canadians who use and depend on the Ottawa River as their drinking water source.”

Chief Dylan Whiteduck of Kitigan Zibi Anishinābeg First Nation told CBC, “They always knew they wanted to do this and they were going to do it with or without us.” Justin Roy of Kebaowek First Nation said, “When building a camp and you need potable drinking water and you build a well, you don’t go and build your outhouse beside that well.”

Industry Inside Job

The Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, charged with determining the NSDF’s safety and granting its operating license, claims it “is an independent administrative tribunal set up at arm’s length from government, without ties to the nuclear industry.” But five of the Commission’s six members have unabashed ties to the nuclear industry.

Look for Part Two of this story in the upcoming Nukewatch Fall Quarterly. Learn about the fraudulent multi-nationals set to run the project, the radioactive legacy left by decades of nuclear work at Chalk River, its links to the Manhattan Project, and the next steps forward for opposition groups.

Radiation-Exposed Communities Vow to Fight On

By Kelly Lundeen

The federal program compensating radiation-exposed community members since 1990 expired June 10. Although the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) assisted many people, it always excluded several communities, including uranium workers after 1971, New Mexico downwinders of the Trinity nuclear test, and other communities in Guam, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Missouri, Montana, and Utah. For years these communities led the struggle for RECA’s expansion to include them. For now, hopes for both the extension of the timeline and the expansion of the program’s eligible recipients have been dashed.

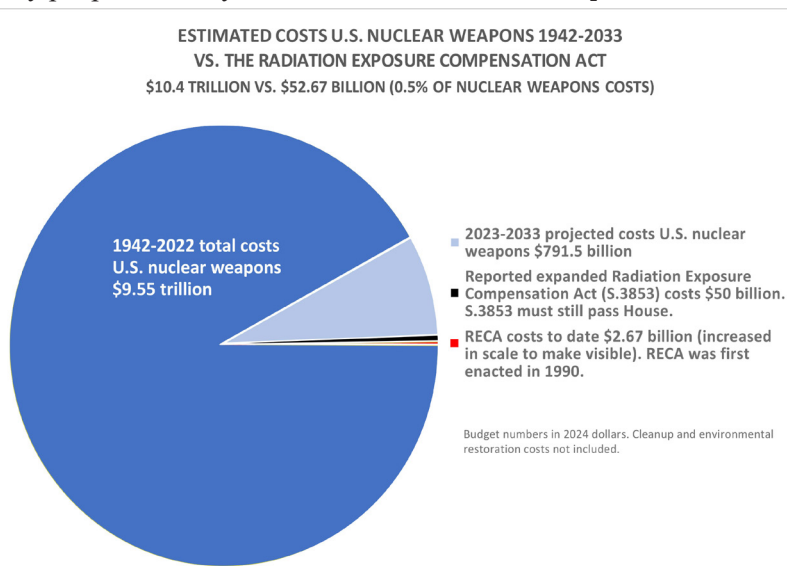
After receiving unprecedented support in the Senate, the extension and expansion failed in the House when Speaker Mike Johnson refused to bring it to the floor for a vote, which if taken, was expected to pass. Republican opposition to expand RECA has focused on the cost to the federal government.

Tina Cordova is one of the Trinity downwinders and co-founder of Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium (TBDC). She told KOB4 News, “I’m the

fourth generation in my family to have cancer since 1945. And unfortunately, now I have a 24-year-old niece who’s diagnosed with thyroid cancer.” In response to issues of cost, Cordova wrote on the TBDC website, “See the pie chart that shows how the cost of RECA [so far \$2.67 billion] compares to

the cost of the U.S. nuclear programs [\$791.5 billion for 2023-2033]. RECA has been a pittance in comparison.” She said, “While they play politics, we’re gathering up our resources for someone to have cancer treatment. We’re having bake sales and car washes and selling cattle so we can meet our health care needs.”

Despite the end of RECA, there are other legislative opportunities to extend and expand the program. Grassroots advocates and allied legislators are committed in the struggle for recognition and compensation for the communities that were never included in RECA in the first place. Cordova said, “We will continue to fight for everyone who has been harmed by nuclear tests, mining, and waste, and we will leave no one behind.” — KOB4 News and Source NM, June 7; Nuclear Watch New Mexico, March 20, 2024



The Chalk River site. Image: The Council of Canadians. Learn more at stopnuclearwaste.com.

Emerging AI Use in the Nuclear Industry

By Mari Inoue

The nuclear industry has been exploring possibilities of the use of Artificial Intelligence in military systems and to facilitate and enhance the work of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Following are some AI trends in the nuclear sector as well as agencies that oversee the use of AI tools:

In mid-April 2024, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) published on its website, “Should artificial intelligence be banned from nuclear weapons systems?,” an article written by a physics professor. The article argues that “AI systems offer an opportunity to strengthen nuclear deterrence by providing a more accurate and capable defensive nuclear response ... AI is simply a strategic tool, like nuclear weapons themselves. Concern over AI should not preclude the use of AI in strengthening nuclear deterrence. Nor should AI be deployed in those systems simply for the sake of deployment.”

In May 2023, Senators Ed Markey (D-MA), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Jeff Markley (D-OR), and Bernie Sanders (I-VT) introduced S.1364, Block Nuclear Launch by Autonomous Artificial Intelligence Act of 2023. The bill prohibits the use of federal funds to deploy nuclear weapons with autonomous weapons systems that are not subject to meaningful human control. The bill aims to ensure that no decision to launch a nuclear weapon or to select or engage targets for such purposes is made by AI.

“We would never defer a decision on nuclear employment to AI,” said Paul Dean, the U.S. State Department’s Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Arms Control, in a May 1, 2024, briefing.

See AI in Nuclear, p.8



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