

Letters to the Editor

Canadians want elected officials to take responsibility for legacy radioactive waste, writes Lynn Jones

Recently, in the House of Commons, Liberal MP Marc Serré, parliamentary secretary to the minister of Energy and Natural Resources, said that Canadians want the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) to decide on the licence for the Near Surface Disposal Facility (NSDF), a giant mound beside the Ottawa River for one million tonnes of radioactive waste. The dump was given the green light for construction last month by the CNSC.

It might be time for Serré and Minister Jonathan Wilkinson to recalibrate their public opinion radar screens. Everyone I've interacted with over eight years of fighting this diabolical dump wants elected officials who are accountable to the Canadian public to take responsibility for this decision.

Serré and his minister might want to get up to speed on how nuclear waste decisions are made in other OECD countries. The document *The Regulatory Infrastructure in NEA Member Countries*, shows that in every OECD country other than Canada elected officials play a role in decisions about nuclear waste facilities.

It would also be a good idea for Serré and Wilkinson to review the text of House of Commons ePetition 4,676, which garnered more than 3,000 signatures in 30 days over the recent holiday season. Petitioners are asking the Government of Canada to issue a directive to the CNSC to request an international peer review of the NSDF, and not make any decision on licensing until Canada's UNDRIP obligations are met. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' principle of free, prior, and informed consent has not been met in the case of the NSDF. Ten out of 11 Algonquin First Nations that have lived in the Ottawa River watershed for millennia say they do not consent to the NSDF on their unceded territory.

Canadians want their elected officials to take responsibility for Canada's legacy radioactive waste, and manage it in ways that will protect Canadians and the environment both now and in the future. They also want the Government of Canada to respect the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples.

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The letter writer is a volunteer with two groups that advocate for responsible management of radioactive waste in the Ottawa Valley: the Concerned Citizens of Renfrew County and Area, and the Ottawa River Institute.



Feds must delay NSDF proposal: two members of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War Canada

Like the "forever chemicals," per- and poly-fluorinated alkyl substances polluting our environment and found in humans, radioactive isotopes from both nuclear power and nuclear weapons pollute us all. Fortunately, the level of radioactive materials existing in our bodies is currently low since nuclear waste has mostly been kept out of the biosphere. However, this could all change if the plan to store radioactive waste in an above ground setting one kilometre from the Ottawa River materializes. Named the Near Surface Disposal Facility (NSDF), this seven-storey high engineered dump is planned to hold up to a million tons of radioactive waste representing eight decades of operation of the Chalk River Laboratories in addition to radioactive waste from medical facilities. We may as well call the future contents of the NSDF "forever isotopes" as many of these elements will remain radioactive for millennia.

No dump lasts "forever," and in the case of the NSDF on the Ottawa River, it seems likely that it will eventually leak into the drinking water of millions of people downstream. First Nations, local citizens, MPs, and municipalities have expressed concern, and have asked for delays in building the NSDF.

The International Atomic Energy Agency identifies some of the elements to be stored as "intermediate level

waste," instead of "low level waste" for which the NSDF was designed. This questions the decision of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) to license this proposal, and adds concerns that the CNSC is heavily influenced by the nuclear industry.

To outsiders, the CNSC appears to have a vested interest in minimizing the risks associated with nuclear waste, and seems to be expediting its efforts to resolve this extraordinarily difficult—if not impossible—challenge to manage radioactive waste safely. Unfortunately, recent decisions to expand nuclear power into newer types of reactors only exacerbates this unresolved problem of radioactive waste management.

Alternatives to the NSDF are being discussed which include retrievability, no abandonment, and continuous guardianship. We add our voices to those already asking that the Government of Canada delay the NSDF proposal until a careful and independent review is done with health concerns top priority.

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