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Daniel Mears / The Detroit News

Normand de la Chevrotiere heads an Ontario group which unsuccessfully sued to force an environmental assessment of the Bruce nuclear plant.

## Nuke foes fight expansion of Canadian plant

### Concerns about waste extend to Metro area

By Tony Manolatos / *The Detroit News*

TIVERTON, Ontario -- Sunsets in this part of Canada are considered some of the best.

But attention lately has been diverted from the colorful hues on the horizon to a nuclear power plant along the tree-lined shores and sandy beaches of Lake Huron. The potential threat from the Bruce nuclear complex in Tiverton, Ontario, stretches across the clear, blue waters of Lake Huron into Michigan and Metro Detroit.

The complex, about 150 miles northeast of Detroit, is the world's largest nuclear power site. It produces and stores more high-level radioactive waste than most nuclear sites.



Daniel Mears / The Detroit News

Storage tanks line the Bruce plant, the world's largest nuclear power site.

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The facility stores about 14,000 tons -- equal to about a third of the nuclear waste that is stored in the United States. Storage space is tight, so plant officials plan to add about 2,000 silos this fall, which would more than double the capacity to store high-level waste to about 35,000 tons.

Bruce officials, Canadian nuclear regulators and an international nuclear safety agency insist the 2,300-acre facility is closely monitored and safe, despite existing safety issues. There has never been a radiation-related death from a nuclear power plant in Canada, which first produced nuclear energy in the 1950s.

But to nuclear-power foes and residents on both sides of the lake, including Metro Detroiters, the risks increase daily as the waste piles up. They want the expansion efforts shelved pending an outside environmental assessment, something Canadian citizens couldn't get.

"This expansion project should be fully and fairly disclosed," said Mark Richardson, an environmental attorney for the Macomb County Prosecutor's Office. "The risk of an accident may be very low, but the consequences of an accident are potentially catastrophic to Metro Detroiters."

There are warning signs.

Plant and Canadian government officials acknowledge the following:

- \* A fisherman broke into the complex last year.

- \* A Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission inspection two years ago found more than a dozen deficiencies.

- \* The plant's incinerator was replaced last year because it didn't meet Canada's new, tougher environmental guidelines.

- \* Ground water near homes and near Lake Huron test positive for radioactive waste.

Despite these issues, an international nuclear safety organization that assessed the complex in May said it's safe.

The World Wide Association of Nuclear Operators is a nonprofit agency that tracks the safety and performance of more than 430 nuclear reactors in 30 countries. However, nuclear power plants fund the agency, and its assessments are confidential.

"If they weren't safe, they wouldn't be operating," said Ed Huk, deputy director of the association's Atlanta office.

## Bruce's size a concern

Monroe resident and autoworker Mark Farris, 51, can see the Fermi 2 nuclear power plant from his yard. But that facility doesn't concern him as much as the Bruce complex "because Bruce is making room for more waste and the bulk of the waste they generate in Canada is at Bruce."

The Bruce complex imports and stores low-level and medium-level waste such as contaminated clothes, mops, filters and other materials from 21 of Canada's 23 nuclear reactors, plant officials said. None of the three operating nuclear power plants in Michigan import waste.

"There are some releases to the water and to the air of radioactive material, but that's the same as any nuclear reactor," said Kay Klassen, who oversees waste management at the Bruce complex for Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission. Releases are monitored.

At a distance of about 40 miles, the Fermi 2 Power Plant on Lake Erie is the closest nuclear plant to Detroit, and it does not release any radioactive material into the water, said John Austerberry, a spokesman for DTE Energy, which owns Fermi 2.

## Security breach

The Bruce complex's neighbors in Canada also are worried about the plant taking in more radioactive waste.

About 300 homeowners in Inverhuron, which borders the Bruce complex, unsuccessfully sued plant officials.

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(updated 08/09/2001).

"There's too much we don't know ... environmental and otherwise," said Normand de la Chevrotiere, president of the Inverhuron homeowners group and an insurance risk assessor.

The Citizens for Alternatives to Chemical Contamination, a Michigan environmental group, started a petition to try to force Bruce officials to conduct an outside assessment of the plant.

"If the public lets out a big enough cry, maybe this storage facility will be reconsidered," said board member Kay Cumbow, 53, a respiratory technician in Port Huron. "Our safety and our lakes are at stake."

Security at the Bruce complex was increased after Sept. 11, although the airspace above the facility remains open, said plant officials, who declined to discuss specifics.

They did, however, admit someone broke into the complex on Sept. 23, 2001.

A man whose boat capsized on Lake Huron near the Bruce complex squeezed through a gate there, entered an office building and phoned for help -- all undetected.

Steve Cannon, a spokesman at the complex, said the fisherman wouldn't have gotten past security at the reactors. "The reactors are the most secured areas on site."

## Shut reactors revived

Ontario Power Generation runs the waste management facilities at the complex but leases the reactors to Bruce Power.

Next summer, Bruce Power intends to restart two reactors shut down four years ago because of technical problems, poor performance and management deficiencies, according to the Sierra Club of Canada, an environmental group.

Bruce Power's Cannon acknowledges the issues but said they would be corrected by the time the reactors reopen.

There are other issues.

A 2000 report of the complex by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission found 15 deficiencies in fire protection, staff training and qualifications, radiation protection programs and other areas.

"There were no unacceptable ratings and the 15 issues are not show stoppers, but they have to be corrected," said commission spokesman Jim Leveque.

In September, Bruce Power officials are scheduled to appear before the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission to provide updates on existing safety issues at the complex, Leveque said.

## Oversight similar in U.S.

In terms of government oversight, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission closely mirrors the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Each oversees, inspects and tests nuclear power plants. Each also issues operating licenses.

Air, lake water, fish, crops and milk supplies in surrounding areas also are tested for radioactivity.

Although all nuclear plants use uranium, plants in the United States enrich it with chemicals, meaning they use and store less used uranium, or high-level radioactive waste, than their Canadian counterparts, nuclear officials said. Combined, the nuclear power plants in the United States store about 45,000 tons of high-level radioactive waste.

## Fuel bundles deadly

Although the spent fuel in Canada doesn't contain as many chemicals as spent fuel in the United States, it still is among the most toxic of all industrial waste products.

An unprotected person standing within a yard of one spent fuel bundle, about the size of a fireplace log, would die within an hour, according to environmentalists and nuclear regulators. There are about 700,000 spent fuel bundles at Bruce.

To store spent fuel, nuclear plants use steel-lined pools of water. When the pools are full, waste is moved to dry storage in concrete and steel silos.

Stacked on top of each other, the 12-foot silos under construction at Bruce would be

taller than Alaska's 20,320-foot Mt. McKinley, the tallest mountain in North America.

Although people are leery of the waste at Bruce, no one knows the damage it would create if it is released. The world's worst nuclear power accident killed thousands of people. In 1986, a reactor at the Chernobyl Power Plant in the former Soviet Union, now Ukraine, overheated and exploded, releasing clouds of deadly radioactive material into the atmosphere.

## Ideal site

The Bruce complex produces electricity in four nuclear reactors, although nine are on site, including one permanently shut down. No site in the world has as many reactors, said Huk, of the World Wide Association of Nuclear Operators.

The site grew in the 1970s and 1980s because the location is ideal for a power plant, Bruce's Cannon said. The area is flat and sturdy, and Lake Huron supplies ample amounts of water needed to run reactors and cool spent fuel.

Any potential changes would have to be diplomatic in nature, Richardson said. The outcome would be based on negotiations between the two countries.

Any scrutiny comforts de la Chevrotiere, 41, who lives within three miles of the complex.

"When I hear a bump in the night, I don't know if I should roll over or run for my life," he said.

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## Nuclear waste storage

The Bruce Nuclear Complex in Canada stores about eight times the combined high-level radioactive waste, or spent fuel, stored in the three nuclear power plants operating in Michigan.

● About 10 tons

### FERMI 2 POWER PLANT

- Year operation began: 1988
- Number of reactors: 1
- Tons of spent fuel: 316



### PALISADES NUCLEAR PLANT

- Year operation began: 1971
- Number of reactors: 1
- Tons of spent fuel: 446



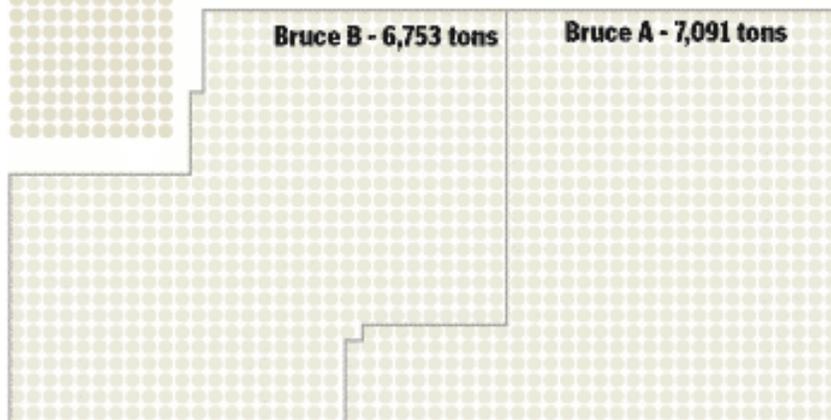
### COOK NUCLEAR PLANT

- Year operation began: 1975
- Number of reactors: 2
- Tons of spent fuel: 1,064



### BRUCE NUCLEAR COMPLEX

- Year operation began: 1968
- Number of reactors: 9
- Tons of spent fuel: 13,844





Sources: U.S. Department of Energy, Ontario Power Generation *The Detroit News*

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