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Nuclear danger alarms residents

Kincardine Mayor
Larry Kraemer says
ratepayers' fears of a
"pretty big powder
keg" are unfounded.

BY SANDRA COULSON
Free Press Reporter

Americans living near the Great Lakes are waking up to the potential dangers of a plan to expand storage of nuclear waste at Bruce Power, a Kincardine community activist says.

Normand de la Chevrotiere of the Inverhuron and District Ratepayers Association said that's why U.S. anti-nuclear activists issued a call Friday for an international review of the plan.

Ontario Power Generation (OPG) wants to begin storing used, highly radioactive nuclear fuel bundles above ground at Bruce Power. The pools where the bundles have been sent for decades are nearly full.

OPG also wants the storage facility to be designated a nuclear installation, which would limit liability for damages to \$75 million.

U.S. activists believe the enlarged storage site, combined with the neighbouring reactors and the nearby freshwater drinking supply could make the plant a terrorist target.

The Inverhuron ratepayers tried to get Canadian courts to order a more in-depth review, but lost their case in March.

De la Chevrotiere said the 300-member association is not anti-nuclear.

"But we want to know if the facility is going to be safe. Where do you draw the line in terms of what's prudent?" the actuary asked.

"It would make a pretty big powder keg."

American nuclear plants have been taking their spent fuel away from the Great Lakes to the mountains of Nevada, he said.

But Kincardine Mayor Larry Kraemer said their concerns are misplaced. "I don't think people quite understand the nature of the facility."

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Kraemer said low- and intermediate-level nuclear waste — mainly workers' protective gear or power plant parts — are of no use to terrorists.

The high-level waste would be sealed in 90-tonne containers welded shut. "So they're thick and heavy and strong enough to take the impact from a train or a supersonic jet and not even fizz on them."

David Shoesmith, a professor at the University of Western Ontario and an expert in nuclear-waste disposal, said above-ground methods are no more dangerous than the pools that have been used.

"I don't perceive this to be any more of a danger from a leakage perspective than it would be no matter where they stored it..." Shoesmith said.

"From a terrorist point of

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*David Shoesmith,
nuclear-waste disposal expert*

But he said a proposal that has been floated to store waste permanently in caverns dug into the Canadian Shield "would be untouchable by this kind of terrorist activity."

The ratepayers' group is afraid the Bruce Power site

will eventually become a centralized storage facility for 20 nuclear plants. It could store 750,000 waste fuel bundles, each about the size of a fireplace log.

Complicating the plan is the financial hardship of British Energy, which leases the nuclear power plants at the Bruce from OPG.

Bruce Power is still a profitable division for British Energy, officials say. OPG runs the storage of nuclear waste separately.

But British Energy's financial difficulties leave open the question whether it could cover its share of liability from an accident.

"I think the community would like to see this financial problem behind Bruce Power and British Energy," Kraemer said.