



Nuclear Information and Resource Service

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Press Statement, Sept. 13, 2002

Re: Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission hearing on the proposed high-level radioactive waste dry cask storage facility at the Bruce nuclear plant.

DON'T BUILD A YUCCA MOUNTAIN ON THE LAKE HURON SHORELINE!

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My name is Kevin Kamps. I serve as Nuclear Waste Specialist at Nuclear Information and Resource Service (NIRS) in Washington, D.C., USA. NIRS has members on both sides of the border throughout the Great Lakes Basin, and is an information and networking center for citizens and environmental organizations concerned about nuclear power, radioactive waste, radiation, and sustainable energy issues. I myself hail from the "Great Lakes State," and am a Board Member of Don't Waste Michigan, the state-wide coalition of citizens and community groups concerned with atomic power and radioactive waste.

NIRS and Don't Waste Michigan are opposed to the high-level radioactive waste dry cask storage facility proposed at Bruce for numerous reasons.

TERRORIST THREAT

Amidst fears of radiological "dirty bombs," and a recently reported interview with al Qaida leaders stating that the original targets for the Sept. 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks upon the United States may have been nuclear facilities, it is an invitation to disaster to build an open air high-level radioactive waste dump on the shoreline of Lake Huron. It would represent a radioactive bull's eye in the heart of the Great Lakes, a terrorist's dream come true. This threat extends to Michigan, 50 miles across Lake Huron from Bruce; to Detroit, 150 miles downstream; and beyond. Please note that terrorists are not known to attack wind turbines.

COSTS OF A CATASTROPHE

How much would it cost to recover from a catastrophic radiation release at Bruce? How much would it cost to replace the lands and waters downstream and downwind? The 1986 Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe, which has shown clearly that radioactivity does not respect national borders, has cost the governments of Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia over \$350 billion (U.S.). That is \$575 billion (U.S.) in year 2002 dollars. Even that huge an amount has proven woefully inadequate to address the human suffering and ecological ruination still on-going in the aftermath of Chernobyl. Ontario Power Generation is worried enough about an atomic catastrophe on the shoreline of Lake Huron that it is seeking Canadian Nuclear Liability Act coverage for its proposed waste dump. In the event of an accident, OPG and its insurance companies would only have to pay, at most, the first \$75 million (Canadian) to injured families and businesses in Ontario, Michigan, and beyond. Anything above that, up to hundreds of billions of dollars, would have to be paid by Canadian taxpayers, through an act of Parliament. The nuclear power industry in the U.S. enjoys similar subsidies and protections. No other industry does.

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BRITISH ENERGY'S FINANCIAL MELTDOWN

Speaking of big bucks, Bruce Power's majority owner is in economic free fall. The British government has agreed to prop up British Energy's shaky house of cards to the tune of a billion Canadian dollars. Incredibly, British Energy's response is that billion dollars Canadian should tide them over for about two weeks. This is not a solid foundation upon which to re-start additional reactors at Bruce, and open the world's largest dry cask storage facility for high-level radioactive waste next to the waters of the Great Lakes. So much for "electricity too cheap to meter." How many wind turbines would a billion dollars build? How many energy conservation and efficiency measures would it pay for?

U.S. CITIZENS AND OFFICIALS KEPT IN THE DARK

Don't Waste Michigan and other environmental organizations have fought hard for the past two decades to try to prevent the de facto permanent dry cask storage of high-level radioactive waste on the shorelines of the Great Lakes, and to prevent the dumping of so-called "low level" radioactive wastes in the Great Lakes Basin.

Citizens and organizations in the U.S. concerned about radioactive waste have been especially busy this year with the decision-making process about whether to proceed with the proposed national repository for high-level radioactive waste at Yucca Mountain, Nevada. Environmentalists across the U.S. have stood united in opposition to the fatally-flawed, industry-driven proposal, and many U.S. Senators and Representatives made strong stands by voting against the project in recent months, including Congress Members from Michigan. Whether opposed to or in favor of the controversial Yucca Mountain proposal, however, citizens and government officials in Michigan and other Great Lakes states share a grave concern about the presence of radioactive waste on their shorelines.

How ironic and incredible, then, that while the Yucca fight has been raging in the US, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission has been methodically, step by step, approving a waste storage facility on the shoreline of Lake Huron, just 50 miles from Michigan, that would dwarf any such dry cask storage facility on the US side of the border, without so much as an environmental assessment.

Michigan's citizens, environmental organizations, and government officials may have been kept in the dark up till now, but will remain so no longer. As we learn about what is currently going on and what is proposed for the future at Bruce, a demand is growing: for information, for consultation, and for meaningful involvement in decision-making. After all, despite the border between us, we do share the air and waters of the Great Lakes.

As the International Joint Commission, the U.S.-Canadian agency responsible for safeguarding the Great Lakes, has said, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure: persistent toxins, including radionuclides, must be prevented from entering the Great Lakes in the first place. How much sense does it make to build the world's biggest dry cask storage facility, de facto permanent storage, of high-level radioactive waste immediately next to the biggest fresh water supply on the planet?

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The best solution to the high-level radioactive waste overflow problem at Bruce is to not make anymore of it in the first place.

What to do with the waste that already exists? Certainly building an open air Yucca Mountain on the shore of Lake Huron is not the answer. Neither is an "out of sight, out of mind" approach to disposal, as in shipping it to a scientifically-indefensible rural region for burial against the wishes of the people there, as proposed in the US at Yucca Mountain. Particularly unacceptable is the targeting of Native American lands for dumps, a blatant manifestation of environmental racism, as at Yucca Mountain with the Western Shoshone and at Grassy Narrows, Ontario with the Ojibwe.

The vast monies being wasted on attempting to revive the moribund nuclear industry must be redirected to safeguarding reactors and on-site wastes against terrorist attack and wear-and-tear, age-related degradation accidents. Now is the time for an orderly phase out of atomic electricity, and a transition to conservation, efficiency, and cleaner, cheaper, safer, renewable sources of electricity. Such a transition would create thousands of new jobs, while the Bruce workforce would be kept busy with decommissioning and clean up. The brand new wind turbine farm, standing between our two great countries at the Straits of Mackinac, is a beacon pointing the way to the future.