

Saskatchewan's Nuclear Addiction Contaminates Both Politics and the People

Global Research News Hour Episode 42

By [Michael Welch](#)

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In-depth Report: [Depleted Uranium](#), [Nuclear War](#)

"The woman who is the Aboriginal relations person for Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO)...She gave me the spiel. I asked her when she was done, "Why would you go through all the trouble, all the expense, and all the risk of transporting that stuff all the way from Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick, across all those provinces, to Northern Saskatchewan when you have the same rock formation in Ontario." She said, "People of Toronto don't feel safe." That made it very clear to me. We are viewed as expendable."
-Candyce Paul, Committee for Future Generations and English River First Nation resident

"You know, the best program for First Nations Métis people in Saskatchewan is not a program at all - it's Cameco. It's a job in the north, it's a chance to engage in the prosperity that we see in Saskatchewan." Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall [1]

The Canadian Prairie province of Saskatchewan has mostly been associated with agriculture, particularly wheat, in the public consciousness. Sheafs of wheat do, after all, appear on the province's coat of arms. [2]

However, the province has seen the growing influence of the nuclear industry. Since the dawn of the nuclear age in the 1940s, Saskatchewan has been one of the world's leading producers of uranium, the critical fuel source for nuclear power generation and nuclear weapons.

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Length (59:26)

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Saskatoon is the headquarters of Cameco. Formed from the merger of two Crown Corporations in 1988, and ultimately privatized in 2002, Cameco is one of the world's largest Uranium producers accounting for 14% of overall world production.[3][4]

Saskatoon is also the headquarters of Areva Resources Canada Inc, a uranium mining, milling, and exploration company.[5]

To say that the nuclear sector in Saskatchewan has influence would be an understatement. For government officials, the nuclear industry represents a significant economic lever involving not only mining, but fueling of future tar sands projects.

Concerns however have arisen about the ways in which the sector is skewing initiatives in the public interest.

In a 2012 article for Briarpatch Magazine, D'Arcy Hande presented his research outlining how the nuclear industry, the government, and the University of Saskatchewan have all colluded to ensure the continued expansion and protection of uranium development in the face of public disapproval. Hande outlines a climate of corporatism nullifying critical appraisals of Saskatchewan's nuclear ambitions, and exposes conflicts of interest at the government and university level.

Hande spoke to the Global Research News Hour about how this collusion came about.

About 2 million spent nuclear fuel rods sit above ground at nuclear sites in Eastern Canada. The Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) has a plan to turn Northern Saskatchewan into a long-term repository for these nuclear wastes.

Three communities – Creighton, English River, and Pinehouse, after being subjected to bribes and intense lobbying, have signed on to this plan.

The Committee for Future Generations was formed in May of 2011 to monitor and resist this plan. One of its representatives, Candyce Paul, who lives in one of the affected communities spoke to us in Saskatoon about her concerns about the plan, the crackdown on dissenting voices, and the stakes both for her community, and for the wider region.

D'Arcy Hande is a retired archivist and historian who has closely followed the uranium industry in Saskatchewan since the rise to power of Brad Wall and his Saskatchewan Party. He is one of the plaintiffs challenging the collaboration agreement between the Mtis community of Pinehouse and companies Cameco and Areva. He has also contributed articles on the subject to Briarpatch Magazine.

His article for BriarPatch Magazine can be found [here](#).

Candyce Paul is a long-time resident of English River First Nation and an active member of the [Committee for Future Generations](#) which recently received the Activist of the Year Award from the Council of Canadians.

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Partial Transcript of interview with Candyce Paul

Michael Welch: I am now here in Saskatoon with Candyce Paul. She's lived in northern Saskatchewan for nearly thirty years, married into the English River First Nation. She's been an active member of The Committee for Future Generations and their campaign to raise awareness of the real risks of the nuclear waste repository being proposed in northern Saskatchewan. So Candyce Paul, I'm very delighted to be able to speak with you. Thank you very much for joining me!

Candyce Paul: Thank you!

Glad to.

MW: I wanted to maybe, first of all, get you to give us a sense of the scale, the environmental aspects of this situation. You know the concerns around this nuclear waste repository. Can you give us a bit of a primer.

CP: The nuclear waste issue reared its ugly head (chuckles) Sorry, um, in 2011, we found out that our band, English River First Nation, had signed up to learn more about nuclear waste. This, uh, came about in May that we found out about it. Um, and the way I found out was there was the article, that's a, uh...what do you call it, current events article for classrooms with questions and answers and in this, in this current events thing there was one regarding English River and Pinehouse and Creighton, the three Saskatchewan communities that had signed on to the Nuclear Waste Management Organization's plan for putting a nuclear waste repository, uh, in northern Saskatchewan, in the Shield country.

Um, in terms of consulting the people, in 2012 they started doing Open Houses in the communities, the Nuclear Waste Management Organization did. And they're very wordy, they're..which in our communities doesn't work well because a lot of people are still coming at English as a second language. And their technical...

MW: When you say a...

CP: ... language, their technical language and comprehension of technical language isn't what...they're not going to be able to comprehend a lot of it. But I...

MW When you say, sorry, it's just when you start talk about an Open House consultation is this like a a school gymnasium or or something like that and people are saying hey come to this consultation and then they people show up and basically they're talked to, or...

CP: Yeah, yeah they have a display there. They hand out replicate key chains so that the children get used to the idea of of a spent fuel rod and uh, hand out pens that don't work.

I listened to the spiel. The woman who is the, uh, Aboriginal relations off..uh.. person for Nuclear Waste Management Organization, we call that NWMO because it's too long to say. So she gave me the spiel. I asked her when she was done, 'why would you go through all the trouble, all the expense, and all the risk of transporting that stuff all the way from Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick, across all those provinces, to Northern Saskatchewan when you have the same rock formation in Ontario.' She said, 'People of Toronto don't feel safe.' That made it very clear to me. We are viewed as expendable.

So, uh, from that time on, another thing I noted at that Open House was one particular frame that they had up there of uh where they were working on convincing English River

First Nation, and I'm sure they had exactly the same thing in each of these other communities, that it is our global responsibility to look after this stuff. So you know we'd be globally, you know recognized for looking after this. Uh, I don't think so. I think everybody else would think you poor suckers. Cuz, we've been doing a lot of research, that's also what the Committee for Future Generations has been doing, and we've been looking into, over the last two and a half years what the risks are because they're not talking about the risks. They say it's dangerous, but they don't really tell you what the risks are.

MW: Do they cite any research that's been done to demonstrate that this is not going to be dangerous to your community?

CP: Um.....

MW: They just say trust us...

CP: They basically have created the the whole scenario. It's their stuff that they're presenting. And, uh, no.

So we've been looking and we've come across peer um reports. Peers in the physics area, the nuclear physics area, the nuclear health and physicians. And uh, they don't all agree. They don't agree, that this is going to work. In fact, this was based on a model for a repository in Sweden, and that one got sent back to the drawing board, because it was proven by peers that it would not last the ter... term of time that needs to last which is well over 250,000 years. In fact, if you want to make sure it's safe from all of the elements, 4.7 billion years. The only thing that man has ever made that lasts that long is this stuff.

MW: What about government's role? What, what are they ...I mean, whatever their opinions might be uh as individuals, I mean are there not obligations to have some sort of rigorous regulatory uh framework that that you'd have to go through in order to make this go forward?

CP: I'm glad you asked that one! (chuckles) Okay, uh the federal government made it a mandate for them to get the approval of the aboriginal peoples, that was one of the first things in their mandate. Which means the intent was always to put it in First Nations territory. As far as regulatory, they have the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission who is already out doing pre-licensing presentations in communities. One thing I have learned from doing um participating in hearings on the uranium mines just recently three weeks ago was that the mining companies...uh...are pretty much setting the safety limits based on what their equipment and processes can do. So the acceptable safety limit matches that. So, in...then there's contention between the province and, the provinces and the federals in terms of there isn't an actual base of what a limit is going to be. So who's regulating what? So these ...recently, um these omnibus bills took out environmental assessments and environmental protections on all these lakes and rivers across the country, and that is going to have an impact on what's what's allowed.

So, um, in terms of what the government wants, Saskatchewan Party government in 2009 had what was called the UDP hearings, Uranium Development Project, and they took their plan of having the value-added uranium development for Saskatchewan across the province to see if they could get the approval of the people. In the end, they got about 80% of the people said no to almost every aspect of their project. And, so they kind of said well when we started out with the walk and stuff in 2011 it was, the word was from the premier I don't

think there's uh much interest in having a nuclear waste repository at this time. Since then he's come out full tilt on his UDP plan. They are still working to develop tar sands development with nuclear power and Saskatchewan has said no to nuclear power repeatedly over the last two century, I mean two decades, and uh this is actually this this whole repository plan idea is not new for Saskatchewan. They've been working on it since 1981.

So, and they've been working on getting it into the North since 1981, and part of that is because of the NAFTA agreement they were working on a deal with the United States. We have actually We have access to flip chart papers that were left behind by Nuclear Management Organization at one of their in-house meetings at a hotel in one of the communities. And uh one of the things on there it said 'Do we tell them everything now or do we just give them bits and pieces and give them sugar-coated information? Do we tell them about the deal with the States?' On there it said 'The leadership will not protect the interests of the people' and a whole lot of other things. It's ...it's...it's absolutely...we know where they're ...what they're pushing. We know where they're coming from, and that is our biggest fear, is that they're talking about 2 million spent fuel rods, by the time they build the repository it'll be 3.4 million spent fuel rods, that's in Canada.

Uh, they got a hundred and four reactors in the United States, and no place to put the stuff. So, you know they're waving the economic carrot but we're the ones taking the risk. And uh when you take the risk on this it's permanent. It's forever.

MW: Um, well you... you... you paint a picture where the people by and large are...don't want this, but...

CP: Not in large no. In the communities, um...in the community of Pinehouse, more than 60% of the people signed a petition against it. That's seen as a visible minority according to Nuclear Waste Management Organization and the administration of Pinehouse. In English River, 373 people signed the petition against, that would mean about all of the adults in the...living on reserve have signed the petition.

So no, nobody really wants this, and everybody would like to see it stopped. But there's political pressure, um, within the communities, like big time. Administrations pretty much run the show. They have in these small communities, they have control of jobs, they have control of houses, they have control of welfare, they have control of everything, right?

So if you don't agree with them or if you speak out against them, yes your job will disappear. That, that happened to me and my husband. Our jobs, our whole school program, which was a very successful school program was completely shut down.

The day after, um, the Band signed an agreement with Cameco and Areva for 604 million dollars or something suddenly there was no money for the school program.

MW: So there are, there are repercussions for speaking out when the administration, the leadership decides to take the bribes or...?

CP: Yes. There is. We've offered to do presentations. We brought in a scientist who is Canada's number one critic, Dr. Gordon Edwards. We brought him into the community and invited the Chief and the Council to come listen. No, they didn't have time and they went about..One representative who sits on the community liaison committee for NWMO came,

stood there for three minutes, wouldn't sit down and after three minutes he says, "Who the hell are you? We're just trying to learn about this! We don't need you to come in here and tell us anything!"

This was an opportunity to learn from a scientist. A person who has studied this stuff for thirty years and is Canada's number one go-to-guy for information on whether or not, uh, anything on nuclear makes sense for an explanation. And they don't want to hear it, because it threatens this little bit of money. 'Cuz 23.7 billion is nothing for this. This would be a 37-year project just to get it started, and uh in the end there's only going to be about eleven jobs. For janitors, and such. Because nobody in our communities is going to have the education background to be working in that place. They won't have ...they won't be there for security. They won't be hired for security jobs. That's a paramilitary that's going to be... being security on those sites. So, and I ...because that's how they're guarded now.

MW: It's nuclear material.

CP: Right! And that's the other aspect. Okay they don't want it in Toronto because it could be a target for terrorists. Um, what about us? Thanks a lot! But that's not the real goal. The real goal, and this is clear in the UDP hearings, and it is at the very end of their scope of things when you look at the Nuclear Waste Management Organization material, they want to be able to re-process it. Re-processing means you melt stuff down, dissolve it in a... boiling acid to get the one percent of plutonium that's in it. What you're left with is radio-active acidic sludge.

Now they do this in France, and in France they use 40% of their fresh water for this.

MW: Are you suggesting that they, what they're doing in France they're going to be doing at or near...

CP: They want to re-process and... they want to re-process and they want to be able to get more of the energy out of out of this stuff.

MW: Would they be, would they be re-processed on site or would they be moving it to another location?

CP: They'd be trying to do this all in Saskatchewan. This is what our Premier has been aiming for. Um, they need a lot of water. So, Northern Saskatchewan is a sponge, it's all water.

And this is the other issue we have, have with the whole repository plan, is because of the water. It's above ground. It's below ground. They say they're going to put it five hundred metres down within a stable rock formation but no rock is stable after you blasted holes in it or drilled holes in it. And uh, plus there's always water. I mean they're having difficulty opening the Cigar Lake mine because it keeps flooding on them from the water pressure within the rock itself. So you fissure that a little bit and you're going to have a problem.

Now this stuff once it sits there, like when they bring it, it would be hot, still physically hot, not just radio-active hot but physically hot. And as it decays it continues to heat and that heat builds. So for instance when you have a candle in a room you have light, right?

You put two million of these things in a chamber below ground. That's going to throw off a hell of a lot of heat. Now you heat rock, add water: KSSH! You got a fractured rock all over

the place!

And these containment systems, um, one of the reports, one of these really big studies that was done on it, um, said that unless the material they use has absolutely no flaws, there is going to be a problem at some point. And if there becomes a problem with this stuff, this is a radio-active explosion.

The [Global Research News Hour](#), hosted by Michael Welch, airs on [CKUW 95.9FM](#) in Winnipeg Fridays at 1pm CDT. The programme is also broadcast weekly (Monday, 5-6pm ET) by the [Progressive Radio Network](#) in the US, and is available for download on the [Global Research website](#).

We welcome our new partner [CHLY in Nanaimo, British Columbia](#)! The Global Research News Hour is now broadcast on CHLY 101.7fm in Nanaimo, B.C every Thursday at 1pm PST!

Notes

- 1) March 28, 2013, " TRANSCRIPT : Brad Wall's controversial address" ; <http://www.paherald.sk.ca/News/Regional/2013-03-28/article-3210090/TRANSCRIPT%3A-Brad-Wall%26rsquo%3Bs-controversial-address/1>
- 2) <http://www.ops.gov.sk.ca/Default.aspx?DN=f9a022a1-b8e7-4bf7-bda2-c245967f30ab>
- 3) <http://www.cameco.com/about/history/>
- 4) <http://www.cameco.com/about/>
- 5) <http://us.areva.com/EN/home-156/areva-in-canada.html>

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