

Stop the Great Lakes Nuclear Waste Dump

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Global Research, July 06, 2013

[EcoWatch](#)

Region: [Canada](#)

Theme: [Environment](#)

July 1 marks Canada Day when many Canadians celebrate the unification of three colonies into their country on the same date in 1867.

In Ontario, droves of people head off to their summer cottages and vacation get-a-ways on the shores of the Great Lakes for the holiday weekend. Lake Huron's sandy beaches and beautiful aquamarine waters attract many visitors from all over the world. But this year, many First Nations were not celebrating the stripping of their sovereignty rights and desecration of their lands.



Those heading to the Saugeen Shores area and the town of Southampton this past weekend were greeted Saturday by the second annual "Walk the Talk" peaceful protest march against not one, but two permanent underground [nuclear](#) dumps less than a mile away from Lake Huron.



More than 500 citizens from across North America gathered at the Southampton, Ontario, flagpole on High Street by the lake. They gathered to voice their opposition to nuke dumps on these beautiful shores and to the continued production of this dangerous and deadly waste. They walked several kilometers through the town and along the beach to heighten awareness and bring attention to this diabolical plan, orchestrated largely in secret by local and national authorities and a deceitful industry, to bury low level, intermediate and high level nuclear waste underground and less than a mile away from this important fresh water source. They gathered to push back against a corrupt political leadership from the local level to the upper levels of dirty energy frontman Stephen Harper's disastrous national government. They marched to say no to an industry that has been lying and deceiving the public about the dangers of nuclear energy and radiation exposure for decades. They walked to promote real [renewable wind and solar energy alternatives](#).

Surely the question that comes to many is why on Earth would anyone in their right mind consider the shores of Lake Huron for the first permanent nuclear dump in North America? Lake Huron sits to the north of Lakes St. Clair, Erie and Ontario and the water of this lake flows southward and eastward, eventually connecting to the Atlantic Ocean through the St. Lawrence Seaway. The Great Lakes account for 21 percent of the world's fresh water resources, or a little over one fifth, and to many native American cultures and First Nation

peoples, the Great Lakes are considered the sacred heart of Turtle Island. So, why would anyone consider dumping radioactive poisons that will remain deathly dangerous for hundreds of thousands of years next to such an integral part of our Great Lakes ecosystem? The answer begins with the human folly of siting what is now the world's largest nuclear energy producer in this very same location.



The Bruce Nuclear Generating Station, with its eight currently operating reactors, is now the largest operating nuclear power plant in the world and fifth largest operating power producer of any kind. When all reactors are operating, it produces 7,276 megawatts a year. It sits directly on the shores of the lake on a sprawling 2300 acre complex that is also home to the Western Waste Management Facility (WWMF), an above ground interim waste storage area for the low level and intermediate level radioactive waste for all 20 of the nuclear reactors operated by Ontario Power Generation.

WWMF stores tons of radioactive wastes in 11 different buildings and has the capacity to burn thousands of pounds of this waste every day. That's right, much of this low level and intermediate-level waste is actually being incinerated sending deadly cancer-causing radionuclides into the atmosphere while leaving growing piles of radioactive ash in their wake, and this has been going on for decades. [Greenpeace](#) has noted that incineration of low and intermediate-level radioactive waste does not destroy metals or reduce radioactivity of wastes. In theory, all but a small fraction of radioactive and metallic emissions from incinerators can be captured with well-maintained, high efficiency filters. However, the small particles that escape are more readily absorbed by living organisms than the larger ones filtered.

The Canadian nuclear industry, like its counterparts in nuclearized countries around the world, was born promoting the myth that nuclear energy is safe, green and too cheap to meter. A visit to Bruce Power Visitor's Center is an immersion into the contradictions we are faced with regarding our energy choices and their repercussions. To arrive to the center, you must pass fields of wind generators in every direction. One hundred fifteen wind turbines make the surrounding wind project one of the largest in Ontario, but the turbines are owned by Enbridge—the same Enbridge that pumps [tar sands](#) from the scorched earth of Alberta through a web of spill prone pipelines to be refined in Sarnia, Detroit, Toledo and other points south. Solar trackers also dot the landscape as farmers invest more and more into the harvesting of renewables.



The center itself is a series of stations and displays extolling the fairy tale of a happy marriage between nukes and the natural world. There are several large murals, one depicts wildlife, first nations, early settlers and the nuclear reactors all harmoniously existing side by side. Another mural shows people boating and fishing in the shadow of the power plant with the words "Radiation is all around us," sprawled across the top and manipulative phrases meant to lull people into considering the cancerous reality of radiation exposure as harmless. The Canadian nuclear industry promotes its Canada Deuterium Uranium (CANDU) reactors as a safe, accident proof method of boiling water that is as innocuous as a mother producing milk, with no harmful side effects. The visitor center at Bruce Power employs the best propaganda the industry can muster in several interactive stations promoting nuclear as the safest and most reliable form of energy while devaluing the role renewables could

play in a much safer energy economy.

The realities of the dangers posed by the CANDU reactors and the inordinate amount of high-level radioactive fuel they produce are outlined in this May 1 [interview](#) with Arnie Gunderson of Fairwinds Energy Education and Dr. Gordon Edwards, president of the Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility titled “Nuclear Contamination Knows No Borders.” CANDU reactors are constantly releasing the known cancer-causing radionuclide tritium into the environment and the levels of tritium in both Lake Ontario and Lake Huron are on a steady increase. Despite a litany of problems with the CANDU design, the industry has done a good job convincing Canadians that they should have no fear of this “fail-safe” reactor design.

With what is now the world’s largest nuclear power plant steaming away on the shores of Lake Huron and a pile of deadly and poisonous radioactive waste that is decades high and growing, Ontario Power Generation is now pushing to transform Lake Huron into a nuclear sacrifice zone. Their plan is to dig out two, what they call Deep Geological Repositories (DGRs), less than a mile away from the Lake and 680 meters below the surface to bury low level, intermediate-level and high-level radioactive waste permanently in shafts carved out of limestone. This is an experiment that has never been done anywhere else in the world and yet just as the nuclear industry tells us that radiation is harmless, we are to believe that this waste will remain safely out of harms way under the Lake for hundreds of thousands of years to come.

Recently, it has come to light that government officials from local mayors all the way up to the current president and CEO of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, Michael Binder, held secret meetings with an association of nuclear power companies called the Nuclear Waste Management Organization charged with locating a dump site. The meetings were held under the guise of the Deep Geological Repository Community Consultation Advisory Group, which consists of a quorum of eight mayors of communities in Bruce County, from 2005 to the fall of 2012. Many of these meetings took place before the public was even made aware of the possibility of siting a high-level waste dump in Bruce County and while the process for siting the low and intermediate level waste dump was still ongoing.

According to documents uncovered by the local group, [Save Our Saugeen Shores](#), Binder, who is a political appointment of the Harper government and chairs what is supposed to be Canada’s neutral nuclear watchdog, warned participants at a meeting on September 30, 2009, of environmental and anti-nuclear groups who “have the project on their agenda. You haven’t seen anything yet.” It seems that Binder had already made up his mind about the validity of the low and intermediate level waste dump as well, stating he hoped “their next meeting with him would be at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the low and intermediate-level waste DGR.”

“Secret meetings between industry, government officials and the nuclear oversight commission are a definite slap in the face to democratic transparency, if not downright illegal,” said Jutta Splettstoesser, a resident and farmer from Kincardine.

“The timing of this discussion is troublesome,” says Cheryl Grace, a spokesperson for Save Our Saugeen Shores, the group which accessed the information. “What’s troubling is the secrecy exhibited by the mayors who were elected to serve the public, not the nuclear industry. We can find no evidence that the mayors, meeting as a county council, felt the need to discuss these issues in a public forum. In our own experience with Saugeen Shores

council, the council regularly goes around the table and each councillor reports on their activities between council meetings. Mayor Mike Smith, who attended these meetings with the nuclear industry, never saw fit to inform his council and the public about these discussions and meetings. Either that or he did so in a separate secret forum, making all of this even more troubling for our community.”

Fortunately, ground has not yet been broken on either of these ill conceived nuclear waste dumps and resistance is growing as word gets out despite Ontario Power Generation and the Canadian Nuclear industry’s best efforts to keep a lid on the project. Locally, citizens groups plan on challenging the legality of the secret meetings and the collusion demonstrated between the mayors of Bruce County and the nuclear industry prior to public knowledge of the dump siting process.

Any serious political opposition party with a little clout can use the obvious industry bias exhibited by the chair of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission to further expose the Harper government’s marriage to dirty energy. Harper already faces sinking popularity and credibility, protecting the nuclear industry’s profit motives in this case has international ramifications for the health and sustainability of the entire Great Lakes region. Even in the U.S., with all its problems of transparency and nuclear malfeasance, an uncovering of such industry bias by an NRC commissioner as was exhibited by Michael Binder would end in his forced resignation or removal, coupled with criminal prosecution.

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, which is an organization of mayors and other elected officials from more than 100 Great Lakes cities and representing over 16 million people, came out in opposition to the DGR 1 for low-level and intermediate level waste in May. Seventy seven percent of these mayors voted to oppose the dump at this time, stating that, “When dealing with a resource as valuable as the freshwater here, why take the risk of putting the site so close to the shore. Whatever the geology might be in the location, it just seems to make much more sense to have the site as far away as possible from such a major source of fresh water” and concluding “the limited time to review the record and prepare comments, the limited outreach to the broader Great Lakes and St. Lawrence community, and the consideration of only one site that is one kilometer from Lake Huron leads us to conclude that the project should not move forward at this time.”

The Michigan State Senate also recently passed a resolution opposing the low and intermediate level nuclear dump and calling for the U.S. congress to intervene to ensure that international agreements are upheld. The resolution also declared that elected officials in Michigan are more engaged in the process to site a dump and that Michigan standards must be adhered to, declaring no dump site of this nature is to be located within ten miles of “Lake Michigan, Lake Superior, Lake Huron, Lake Erie, the Saint Mary’s River, the Detroit River, the St. Clair River or Lake St. Clair.” Michigan standards also exclude “sites located within a 500-year floodplain, located over a sole source aquifer, or located where the hydrogeology beneath the site discharges groundwater to the land surface within 3,000 feet of the boundaries of the site. We encourage Canada to consider similar siting criteria.” The Macomb County commissioners also passed a resolution opposing the siting of the DGR 1 or any other dump so close to the shores of any Lake in the Great Lakes Basin.

Groups are organizing at the grassroots level and they need your support. The Ontario Power Generation and the Canadian government would like us to think that the DGR 1 for low and intermediate-level waste is a done deal, but it’s not! The time is now to raise your voice on this important issue.

"The only answer to the problem of nuclear waste is to stop producing it, however the nuclear industry is gunning for a deep geological repository as a solution to nuclear waste storage so they can promote nuclear expansion. Activists and residents are working with Indigenous Nations and environmental groups across borders and oceans to call on our governments to stop producing it now," said Zach Rüter of [GE-Hitachi's Uranium Secret](#) in Toronto. No safe, permanent solution has yet been found anywhere in the world for the nuclear waste problem.

A [petition](#) by the [Stop the Great Lakes Nuclear Dump](#) citizens group is circulating via the internet that can be signed to stop the low and intermediate level dump. The following groups provide more information on how to actively participate in stopping these nuke dumps on the shores of Lake Huron: [Save Our Saugeen Shores](#), [Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility](#), [Northwatch](#) and [Ontario's Green Future](#).

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