

# Parliament should investigate what Canadians have gotten for their nuclear waste funding

*Gordon Edwards, Opinion, The Hill Times, May 27 2019*

On April 29, twenty-three civil society groups and a First Nations alliance published a joint statement in the Hill Times expressing concerns about the alarming manner in which federally-owned radioactive wastes are being handled by a consortium of SNC-Lavalin and two US-based multinational corporations. [ [www.ccnr.org/Hill\\_Times\\_ad\\_April\\_29\\_2019.pdf](http://www.ccnr.org/Hill_Times_ad_April_29_2019.pdf) ]

It is disturbing that the President of Atomic Energy of Canada Limited (AECL), himself an American and former executive from one of SNC-Lavalin's original consortium partners, accuses the authors of spreading “inaccuracies” – “misleading and incorrect” information that “distorts” the truth – without citing a single example. (Letter, Hill Times, May 13 2019) [ [www.ccnr.org/Sexton\\_ltr.pdf](http://www.ccnr.org/Sexton_ltr.pdf) ]

The endorsing organizations stand behind every point raised in their joint statement. Any one of their concerns provides enough reason for the Prime Minister, Parliament and Federal Government to change the current approach to the handling of long-lived radioactive wastes in Canada – a toxic liability estimated at \$7.9 billion by the Auditor General. Each concern is legitimate, well-founded and echoed by many others: independent scientists, municipalities and concerned citizens, including [fifteen former AECL managers and scientists](#). [See <https://tinyurl.com/y6ppu27a> ]

AECL has received over \$3 billion of taxpayers' money in the past three federal budgets, handing most of that money over to the private consortium. The 2019-2020 budget alone has \$737 million earmarked for radioactive waste management and decommissioning at federally-owned sites, a significant increase since the 2015 GoCo private contracting model was brought in by the Harper government.

We call on Parliament to investigate whether this funding has translated into significant reductions in federal radioactive liabilities, and whether taxpayers are receiving real long-term value for the money being spent.

The consortium's plan to erect a gigantic surface mound containing over one million tonnes of mixed radioactive wastes, seven stories high and 11 hectares in area, just one kilometre from the Ottawa River, is shocking. This proposal flouts international guidance and is opposed by 140 downstream municipalities that use the river for drinking water, including Gatineau and the Montreal Metropolitan Community.

Equally troubling is the consortium's plan to “entomb” two contaminated nuclear reactors in cement right beside the Ottawa and Winnipeg Rivers. Far from being

a “modern solution”, as the AECL head claims, the International Atomic Energy Agency states that “entombment is not considered an acceptable strategy” unless exceptional circumstances prevail, such as a core meltdown – and even then alternatives should be explored.

We are concerned by the absence of any adequate federal policy or regulations specifically for reactor decommissioning and radioactive waste management (other than irradiated nuclear fuel). Canada’s sole policy document, a 143-word “Radioactive Waste policy Framework” lacks substantive content and fails to meet minimal international requirements. Minister of Natural Resources [Jim Carr](#) [wrote](#) in July 2018, “Canada does not yet have a federal policy for the long-term management of non-fuel radioactive waste.”

These wastes are the sole responsibility of the government of Canada. Roughly half of them were generated during the development of the atomic bomb and the subsequent Cold War build-up of American nuclear weapons. Now is the time for our government to take a serious, direct proprietary interest in these wastes, to ensure the protection of current and future generations of Canadians from the health risks of exposure to dangerous long-lived radioactive materials, risks that include genetic damage, chronic diseases, birth defects and cancer.

Canada’s radioactive waste legacy has been growing for over 70 years; the hazard will last for tens of thousands of years; the problem cannot be dealt with “quickly and cheaply”.

We repeat our call to end the Government-owned Contractor-operated “Go-Co” contract with SNC-Lavalin and its partners, and to consult First Nations and other Canadians with a view to formulating exemplary policies and projects for radioactive waste that meet and exceed our international obligations. We believe these wastes must be safely secured in state-of-the-art facilities well away from sources of drinking water, packaged and labelled in such a way as to enable future generations to monitor, retrieve, repair, and repackage such wastes if and when the need arises. We urge that the import, export and transport of radioactive waste not be allowed without full consultation with affected communities and careful consideration of alternatives.

Such actions will begin to re-establish Canadian leadership in the nuclear field by addressing the growing global radioactive waste problem in a responsible manner while creating many long-term, well-paying Canadian jobs.

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*For additional information: [www.ccnr.org](http://www.ccnr.org) and [www.concernedcitizens.net](http://www.concernedcitizens.net)*