

MEDIA RELEASE

Groups say federal funding of new nuclear reactors is a “dirty, dangerous distraction” from tackling climate change

Ottawa, October 20, 2020 — Public interest groups across Canada are criticizing the federal government for funding small nuclear reactor development and are challenging the government to release the research and data that support its strategy.

Ministers Seamus O’Regan and Navdeep Bains last week announced a \$20 million grant to Terrestrial Energy in Ontario to continue developing a molten salt reactor. More funding announcements for new nuclear reactors are expected in the coming weeks.

The federal funding for new nuclear energy is opposed by groups from BC to New Brunswick, including the West Coast Environmental Law Association, Friends of the Earth Canada, Greenpeace Canada, Canadian Environmental Law Association, Environmental Defence, Coalition for Responsible Energy Development in New Brunswick, Coalition for a Clean Green Saskatchewan, Concerned Citizens of Manitoba, Northwatch, Sierra Club Canada Foundation, Ralliement contre la pollution radioactive, Équiterre and the Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility.

The groups say “next generation” nuclear reactors are a dirty, dangerous distraction from tackling the climate crisis. Nuclear energy is not green, not clean, too costly and too slow to build.

The groups charge that the federal government is trying to save the nuclear industry rather than saving the environment and protecting health.

The groups say that:

SMR development is too slow to address the climate crisis:

The [2020 World Nuclear Industry Status Report](#) says that developing new nuclear energy is too slow to address the climate crisis – as well as more expensive – compared to renewable energy and energy efficiency. No SMRs have yet been built and the models being proposed will take a decade or more to develop.

SMRs are more expensive than renewable energy:

A [Canadian study](#) found that energy from small nuclear reactors would be up to ten times the cost of renewable energy. In the past decade, the cost of building solar, wind power and battery storage has gone down dramatically, while the cost of building new nuclear reactors has gone up. Small reactors will be even more expensive per unit of power than the current large ones.

Nuclear power creates fewer jobs than renewable energy:

Renewable energy is one of the fastest-growing job sectors in North America. An [American study](#) found that solar energy leads to six times as many jobs as nuclear power for each gigawatt-hour of electricity generated.

There are better sources of energy:

Minister O’Regan has said repeatedly, without providing evidence, that there is no path to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions without nuclear energy. In fact, on the contrary [a new study](#) of 123 countries over 25 years found that countries that invested in renewable energy lowered their carbon emissions much more than those reliant on nuclear energy.

SMRs are dirty and dangerous:

The new “small” reactors, proposed to be built across Canada, will produce radioactive waste of many kinds. Some of the proposed models would extract plutonium from irradiated fuel, worsening concerns about weapons proliferation and creating new forms of radioactive waste that are especially dangerous to manage. The federal government currently [has no detailed policy or strategy](#) for what to do with radioactive waste, and no design or location for a deep underground repository where industry proposes to store high-level radioactive waste for hundreds of thousands of years.

The federal government has never consulted the public about small modular reactors, which would create environmental risks and financial liabilities for Canadians.

Public Interest Groups Opposing SMR Funding:

Action Climat Outaouais (Que.)
Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment
Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility
Canadian Environmental Law Association
Citizens' Network on Waste Management (Ont.)
Coalition Against Nuclear Dumps on the Ottawa River (Ont.)
Coalition for a Clean Green Saskatchewan
Coalition for Responsible Energy Development in New Brunswick
Committee for Future Generations (Sask.)
Concerned Citizens of Manitoba
Concerned Citizens of Renfrew County and Area (Ont.)
Council of Canadians Saint John
Environmental Defence
Équiterre
Extinction Rebellion New Brunswick
Friends of the Earth Canada
Greenpeace Canada
The Inter-Church Uranium Committee Educational Cooperative (Sask.)
Leap4wards Saint John
MiningWatch Canada
Northwatch
Nova Scotia Voice of Women for Peace
Old Fort William Cottagers’ Association (Que.)

Ontario Clean Air Alliance
Ralliement contre la pollution radioactive (Que.)
RAVEN at the University of New Brunswick
Science for Peace
Sierra Club Canada Foundation
Sustainable Energy Group, New Brunswick
VOICES for Sustainable Environments and Communities (N.B.)
West Coast Environmental Law Association (B.C.)
YYC for a Green New Deal

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Media contacts:

Kerrie Blaise Tel: 416-960-2284 ext 7224 kerrie@cela.ca	Eva Schacherl 613-316-9450 evaschacherl@gmail.com
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SOURCES:

2020 World Nuclear Industry Status Report –

<https://www.worldnuclearreport.org/The-World-Nuclear-Industry-Status-Report-2020-HTML.html>

Too small to be viable? The potential market for small modular reactors in mining and remote communities in Canada. Sarah Froese, Nadja C.Kunza, M.V.Ramana, *Energy Policy*, Sept. 2020

Putting renewables and energy efficiency to work: How many jobs can the clean energy industry generate in the US? Max Wei, Shana Patadia, Daniel M. Kammen, *Energy Policy*, Nov. 2009

Differences in carbon emissions reduction between countries pursuing renewable electricity versus nuclear power. Sovacool, B.K., Schmid, P., Stirling, A. et al. *Nature Energy*, Oct. 2020

International peer review finds deficiencies in Canada’s nuclear safety framework.

<https://concernedcitizens.net/2020/03/07/international-peer-review-finds-deficiencies-in-canadas-nuclear-safety-framework>