

Radioactive waste management sound in Canada, says Crown agency head

This is in response to the advertisement published in the April 29 edition of The Hill Times (page 3) regarding the management of Canada's radioactive waste, which contained a number of inaccuracies. We feel strongly about correcting the misleading and incorrect information that unnecessarily and unfairly distorts the nature and scope of our activities, which are, in fact, aimed at protecting the environment and reducing risk.

Atomic Energy of Canada Limited (AECL) is a federal Crown corporation and agent of the government of Canada. AECL owns radioactive waste arising from more than 60 years of important and internationally beneficial nuclear research and development—research that has enabled more than one billion life-saving medical isotope procedures, and underpins 60,000 jobs tied directly and indirectly to Canada's nuclear industry.

At AECL, we have always taken, and continue to take, our responsibility to manage our radioactive waste safely and effectively very seriously, and we are presently leading efforts to address the legacy radioactive waste arising from the important and beneficial research and development from the past. We are accelerating work in all areas of our environmental remediation program because we recognize our duty to deal with the waste to reduce risks that exist today and to not leave the burden to future generations. AECL believes that all of our initiatives in this regard represent the implementation of modern solutions to radioactive waste—solutions vastly superior to present solutions based on legacy and outdated approaches.

Through a government-owned, contractor-operated (GoCo) model, AECL has access to world-class expertise in radioactive waste management and to individuals that have decades of experience undertaking similar projects in the United States and the United Kingdom. AECL as a federal Crown corporation has its own staff that bring a breadth of expertise from within Canada and abroad to be able to ultimately decide on which projects will most responsibly address its environmental management needs, and to properly oversee the spending of money against these projects.

AECL oversees all aspects of the contract, sets priorities, and assesses performance. AECL's role is to obtain value for money, contain costs and risks, and protect the government's and taxpayers' interests while maintaining high levels of safety, security, and protection of the environment. Our contracts include integrity provisions with which all shareholders and guarantors must remain compliant and in respect of which they are all presently compliant.

The government of Canada's Radioactive Waste Policy Framework provides a set of principles governing the institutional and financial arrangements for the long-term

management of radioactive waste, including a clear assignment of the roles and responsibilities of both the federal government and waste owners. Under the policy framework, waste owners are responsible for the funding, organization, management, and disposal of their radioactive waste.

Radioactive waste and associated facilities are regulated by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC), Canada's experienced and modern regulator. Radioactive waste management projects have been put forward by Canadian Nuclear Laboratories on behalf of AECL to enable us to address our environmental liabilities. These projects are very much designed to protect the environment, and will enable us to remediate contaminated lands and reduce Canada's environmental liabilities. The projects include a proposal to build a near surface disposal facility at our Chalk River site to dispose of AECL's low-level radioactive waste—essentially contaminated soil, building material and personal protective equipment such as gloves and mops.

They also include a proposal to decommission in situ—i.e. by immobilizing them in place—two research and prototype reactors located in Ontario and Manitoba in their current stable location. These projects are all aligned and consistent with international best practices, including similar projects, which have been safely executed elsewhere in the world, and represent the implementation of modern solutions to manage radioactive waste. All projects are currently undergoing environmental assessments, which involve public and Indigenous engagement, as well as technical and scientific reviews by federal and provincial regulators.

It is our responsibility as a federal Crown corporation to ensure that our sites are managed in a way that brings value for Canada, including protecting the environment and the interests of taxpayers over the long term. We welcome healthy and respectful dialogue on our activities, but caution against misinformation that distorts the nature and scope of our activities and which may also cause unnecessary apprehension. Safety of the public, workers and the environment is, and will continue to be, paramount in everything that we do. Members of the public and Indigenous groups can learn more about our activities at www.aecl.ca and at www.cnl.ca.

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Atomic Energy of Canada Limited